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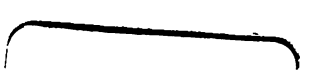

MORAL

ENTERTAINMENTS

On the moſt Important

PRACTICAL TRUTHS

OF THE

Chriſtian Religion.

In THREE VOLUMES.

By *ROBERT MANNING.*

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XLIIId Entertainment.

Of Phariſaical Virtue.

Unleſs your Juſtice abounds more than that of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Mat. v. 20.

THE Word *Juſtice* may be taken either in a ſtrict or larger Senſe: *Juſtice*, ſtrictly taken, is a particular Virtue, which inclines us to give to every Man what belongs to him; and in this Senſe a fair-dealing Man, or one that never wrongs his Neighbour, either in his Goods or Reputation, is called a juſt or upright Man: But *Juſtice*, taken in a

larger Senſe, and as it is to be underſtood in the Words of my Text, is of a much more ample Signification, and imports a certain Complex or Collection of all Virtues: For, according to this latter Meaning of the Word *Juſtice*, he alone can be accounted *Juſt*, who is in the State of Grace; that is, free from all mortal Sin: For let our Dealing be never ſo fair and upright in Relation to Men, if our Souls be tainted with any one mortal Sin, we are void of this *Juſtice*, and reputed *Unjuſt* in the Sight of God. So that the Meaning of our Saviour's Words is, that unleſs we be more *virtuous* and *perfect* than the *Phariſees* were, *we ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

It is therefore a Point of great Importance to inform ourſelves exactly in what Particulars the Virtue of the *Phariſees* was defective; and by conſequence in what Quality or Degree of Virtue we are bound to ſurpaſs them, under Pain of eternal Damnation. We plainly ſee here is nothing leſs at Stake than our eternal Salvation: Our Saviour's Words are poſitive, that *unleſs our Juſtice abounds more than that of the Scribes and Phariſees, we ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* Since therefore 'tis impoſſible to comply with any Obligation, unleſs we firſt know what it is, 'tis doubtleſs our

neareſt

neareſt Concern to examine what thoſe Virtues are, which were wanting to the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, and without which we ſhall be excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven: And truly, nothing but a ſupine Neglect of Salvation can render us indifferent in a Matter of this Importance.

Suppoſe our Lives and Fortunes were at Stake, and a ſkilful Lawyer ſhould inform us, that there are certain Formalities to be obſerved in the Law, the Omiſſion whereof would utterly ruin our Cauſe; ſhould we not be very ſolicitous to be inſtructed what thoſe Formalities are, that we might be exact in the Obſervance of them? Now this is our very Caſe in a Matter of Importance infinitely greater: For 'tis not a Life that paſſes in a Moment, nor a few earthly Poſſeſſions liable to a Thouſand Chances; but an everlaſting Life, and the infinite Treaſures and Joys of Heaven, that are at Stake. Our Saviour has informed us, in the Words of my Text, that there are certain Diſpoſitions eſſentially requiſite for the purchaſing theſe Treaſures, and attaining to this happy Life: He tells us, that the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* were void of theſe Diſpoſitions; and that unleſs we acquire them, and ſo ſurpaſs them in Virtue, we ſhall periſh eternally. Ought we not then to enquire, with the utmoſt Care, what

theſe Diſpoſitions are, ſince without them we cannot poſſibly be ſaved? I preſume then, it will be a charitable Office to clear a Point of this Importance; and 'tis what I ſhall endeavour to do in this Entertainment, by marking out the moſt conſiderable Defects of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, and ſhewing how we muſt avoid them.

Before I proceed to lay open the Defects of the *Scribes* and *Phariſees*, it will not be amiſs to give you ſome Account of the Virtues they practiſed: *Firſt* then, our Saviour never accuſed them of any Defect in their *Faith:* They believed whatever they imagined at leaſt, that God had revealed to their Fore-fathers: They had a great Reſpect and Veneration for the Law of *Moſes*, and it was their greateſt Glory to profeſs themſelves his Diſciples: They lived in the Expectation of their *Meſſias*, which was the Fundamental Point of their Religion: Nay, they were ſo zealous for the Converſion of Infidels, that they often made long and toilſome Journeys by Land or Sea to gain one Proſelyte.

But, *Secondly*, our Saviour never accuſed them of any groſs Crimes; for he neither charged them with *Idolatry*, nor violating the *Sabbath-day*; nor with *Murder*, or *Adultery*, or *Theft*, or *bearing falſe Witneſs againſt their Neighbour:* They were alſo moſt

moſt exact Obſervers of the Ceremonial Law, even to the utmoſt critical Niceties; inſomuch, that they were highly ſcandalized at the Apoſtles, becauſe they did not waſh their Hands before Meals; and becauſe, being one Day preſſed with Extremity of Hunger, they plucked ſome Ears of Corn on the Sabbath-day: Beſides they faſted twice a Week, and their Faſts were very rigorous: They ſpent much Time in Prayer; they beſtowed great Alms on the Poor; and were punctual in paying Tithes, not only of Things commanded by the Law, but even of the ſmalleſt Herbs that grew in their Gardens: And who would not now imagine, but that the Lives of theſe Men might be propoſed as Patterns of Virtue even to the beſt of Chriſtians? Were we thus punctual in the Obſervance of all outward Duties, ſo addicted to Prayer, ſo juſt to our Neighbour, and charitable to the Poor, as theſe Men were, ſhould we not be apt to ſet a Value on ourſelves, and think ourſelves ſecure of Salvation? And yet Almighty God, the Searcher of Hearts, has pronounced their Condemnation, and forewarned us, that *unleſs our Juſtice abounds more than theirs, we ſhall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* Now then let us examine what their Defects were,

that we may take care to avoid the Rock on which they were Ship-wreck'd.

Their firſt Defect was the Pride of their Hearts; the two chief Branches whereof were a preſumptuous Opinion of their own Holineſs and Merits, and a great Contempt of others: This proud Opinion of themſelves, and Contempt of others, was chiefly occaſioned by their great Exactneſs in all outward Duties: Nor is this to be wonder'd at; becauſe all outward Actions being clear and viſible, and they imagining that all Virtue conſiſted in a punctual Performance of them, they thought themſelves perfect Patterns of Virtue, and free from all Defects. Hence it was, that inſtead of proſtrating themſelves before Almighty God in Quality of Criminals, and with an humble Senſe of their own Unworthineſs and Miſery, they planted themſelves before him bolt-upright, with a certain Air of Confidence and Arrogance, as if they came rather to upbraid him with the ſignal Services they thought they did him, than to ſupplicate for Mercy and Pardon of their Sins: Finally, the Corruption of their Hearts being wholly concealed from them by their exceſſive Pride, they were entirely void of that humble Diſpoſition recommended by St. *Paul*, which obliges us *to work our Salvation in Fear and Trembling*;

Trembling; to lament daily before Almighty God the Wounds of our Souls, and have Recourſe to him with Confidence indeed, but a Confidence wholly grounded on his infinite Goodneſs, and the Merits of *Jeſus Chriſt*.

But this preſumptuous Opinion they had of their own Holineſs and Merits, gave Birth to a ſecond criminal Diſpoſition, no leſs odious in the Sight of God than the former; *viz.* their Contempt of others: This appears in the proud Prayer of the *Phariſee*, related in the 18th Chapter of St. *Luke*; where, inſtead of making an humble Confeſſion of his Sins, he recites a long Catalogue of his own good Works, and thanks God *for that he was not ſo bad as other Men*, particularly the *Publican*, whom he ſaw praying at the ſame Time in the Temple: Nay, this contemptible Opinion of others, and vain Conceit of themſelves, was carried to ſuch a Height, that they ſeparated themſelves from noted Sinners, as from Perſons unworthy of their Converſation, or even to touch any Part of them: For it was upon this Account, that they were ſo highly ſcandalized at our bleſſed Saviour, who refuſed not to eat and drink, and converſe with Sinners, and permitted a notorious Sinner to waſh and kiſs his Feet.

Finally, as they had a great Opinion of themſelves, and Contempt of others, ſo had they alſo an inſatiable Ambition of being honoured and eſteemed by all the World: They challenged to themſelves the firſt Place in all Aſſemblies, and required a particular Reſpect to be paid them as they paſſed through the Streets: They took upon them a certain Air of Authority, and affected to be called *Maſter:* But, above all, they had a ſingular Ambition to reign in the Hearts and Eſteem of the People; for which End it was their Practice to go from Houſe to Houſe, and inſinuate themſelves into the Favour of certain bigotted Women, as being the moſt proper Subjects to paſs their Cheats upon.

Our Saviour taxes them with all theſe Things in the 24th Chapter of St. *Matthew*; where he diſcovers to us a ſecond eſſential Defect, which ran univerſally thro' all their Actions, and tainted them in the very Root; *viz.* a Deſire of Vain-glory in the Performance of them: For they did every Thing (as Chriſt teſtifies) *to be ſeen and eſteemed by Men:* When they faſted, they put on an Air of Sadneſs, disfigured their Faces, and affected to look pale, that the World might have an Opinion of the Rigour of their Faſts: They choſe certain

Thorough-

Thorough-fairs of the Town to pray in, that People paſſing by might take Notice of them; and when they diſtributed Alms, they cauſed a Trumpet to ſound before them, that the whole Town might know of it.

Thus we ſee the two principal Defects of the *Phariſees* were *Pride* and *Vain-glory*: Let us now conſider how we muſt avoid theſe two dangerous Rocks: Their firſt Defect, as I have obſerved, was occaſioned by their great Exactneſs in performing outward Duties: Muſt we then omit them, or perform them careleſsly, for fear of being proud, as the *Phariſees* were? By no Means; becauſe a faithful Performance of exterior Duties, whether relating to Chriſtianity in general, or any one's particular Calling, is not only commendable, but of Obligation: We muſt therefore be faithful in performing all the Duties of the Religion we profeſs: *Sundays* and Holidays, commanded by the Church, muſt be religiouſly obſerved; our Morning and Evening Devotions muſt never be omitted; we muſt faſt and pray, frequent the Sacraments, and be preſent at the ſacred Myſteries of the Altar, and other publick Devotions, both with an inward Attention, and ſuch an outward Decency, as may give Edification to all that ſee us; finally, no exterior Duty is to be neglected.

But we muſt not ſtop here, nor flatter ourſelves that this alone ſuffices to Salvation: For a Chriſtian may be condemned, as the *Phariſees* were, with all this gawdy Pageantry of Piety and Virtue; becauſe all this is but the Shell and Outſide of Devotion: And therefore farther Care muſt be taken that our outward Actions be ſo accompanied with ſolid Humility of the Heart, and ſincere Charity to our Neighbour, that we may be as truly virtuous in the Sight of God as we appear to the Eyes of Men: So that it is a dangerous Error to imagine the bare Performance of outward Duties is ſufficient to Salvation; becauſe Salvation is not to be attained without true Virtue, and all true Virtue, tho' it manifeſts itſelf by outward Works, is ſeated in the Heart alone. Whoever is moſt *humble*, *meek*, and *patient*; moſt *charitable*, *mortify'd*, and *reſigned*, in all Things to the Will of God, is doubtleſs the moſt truly virtuous; and, by conſequence, whoever is neither *humble*, nor *meek*, nor *patient*, nor *charitable* to his Neighbour, nor *mortified* in his Inclinations, nor *reſigned* to the Will of God, is not at all virtuous, tho' he be never ſo devout in Appearance. Pride, Ambition, Preſumption of ourſelves, or a Contempt of others, are all great Sins in the Sight of God, and perhaps more

hateful

hateful to him, than Sins that are counted infamous amongſt Men. *Lucifer*, and the other Apoſtate Angels, are a frightful Inſtance of this Truth; for they were only guilty of Pride, and yet that Sin alone transformed them into Devils, and threw them into everlaſting Flames.

The Conſideration of this Truth may ſerve as a moſt effectual Preſervative both againſt an over-weaning Confidence in our own Virtue, and Contempt of others for Faults, of which we are not conſcious to ourſelves: For how well ſoever our outward Comportment may be regulated, it being certain on the one Hand, that we are all more or leſs guilty of Pride, and wholly uncertain on the other, to what Degree we are infected with it, it follows, that we can never form a poſitive Judgment, that we are more virtuous than our Neighbour, tho' we ſee him fall into Sins, of which our Conſcience is wholly clear; becauſe, for ought we know, our Souls may be ſo tainted with Pride, or other ſpiritual Sins, as to be more criminal in the unerring Judgment of Almighty God, than thoſe whom we deſpiſe for Sins of a groſſer Nature, whereof we know ourſelves not guilty.

But beſides the proud Opinion of themſelves, which the *Phariſees* were guilty of, they

they ſtand charged (as I have obſerved) with another criminal Diſpoſition, in *doing all their Works to be ſeen and praiſed by Men:* Which Deſire of Vain-glory poiſoned their very beſt Actions, deſtroyed their whole Merit, and entitled them to no other Reward than that of Hypocrites; for as they laboured to gain the Eſteem of Men, ſo our Saviour told them, they ſhould receive their deſired Reward in this Life.

It is certain, that to make any Creature our laſt End, is attributing to it that Honour which is due to God alone, who, as he is the *firſt Cauſe*, ſo is he the *laſt End* of all Things. All Creatures void of Reaſon are immediately directed to this End by God himſelf: They all act, move, or reſt according to the Syſtem eſtabliſhed by the eternal Wiſdom, and are but ſo many Inſtruments and Executioners of God's unchangeable Decrees: But Man having received a rational Soul, and being endued with a Free-will, has a Capacity within himſelf of chooſing the End and Motive of his Actions: But this Capacity is charged with an indiſpenſable Obligation of directing them to that End, for which he was created; and ſince this is no other than God himſelf, when ever he acts upon any other principal Motive than that of pleaſing Almighty God in this Life, and enjoying

joying him in the next, he ſwerves from the End of his Creation, he debaſes himſelf, injures his Creator, and ſubverts, as far as in him lies, the Order of Providence: And this was preciſely the Crime of the *Phariſees*, in doing all their Works meerly to gain the Applauſe and Eſteem of Men.

If then you aſk, how this great Evil may be avoided? I anſwer, that the beſt, and indeed the only effectual Means to ſecure ourſelves againſt it, is to purify our Hearts from all inordinate Affection to Creatures. The Reaſon hereof is clear, becauſe in every Thing we do, we are apt to have the greateſt Regard to the Object we love moſt. So that whoever is ſtrongly affected with any Thing of this World, is in great Danger of performing the main Body of his Actions, for the Love of that Object. This was the very Caſe of the *Phariſees*: For they had a paſſionate Love for the Eſteem of Men, and therefore they performed all their Actions to acquire that Eſteem. This was the Idol of their Hearts; this they prefer'd before Almighty God; to this they ſacrificed all thoſe outward Works of Piety and Virtue, which if they had been performed for the Love of God, would have entitled them to an eternal Reward.

Whence

Whence it follows, that every Man's predominant Love is as a Biaſs upon his Heart, which continually moves and turns it to the proper Object of that Love; and therefore if our Hearts were clear from all inordinate Affection to Creatures, we ſhould have no earthly Biaſs to turn away our Intention from Almighty God; nay, we ſhould then moſt certainly love God above all Things; and whoever regards Almighty God as the Object of his principal Love, will eaſily perform all his Actions for Love of him; that is, with a ſincere Intention to pleaſe him in this Life, and a hearty Deſire to poſſeſs him in the next. For what can be more eaſy than a ſincere Deſire to pleaſe a Perſon whom we ſincerely Love? What more eaſy than to aim effectually at the everlaſting Fruition of an Object, with the Love whereof our Hearts are ſtrongly and ſovereignly poſſeſs'd? So that the Rectifying of our Intention, in the Performance even of the moſt ordinary Duties, is not ſo difficult a Thing as ſome ſeem to make it. *Love, and do what thou wilt*, ſays St. *Auſtin*, meaning the Love of God: Becauſe that Love will of itſelf lead us to the Intention we ought to have in every Thing we do; and we ſhall be in no Danger of ſeeking with the *Phariſees* the Eſteem of Men preferably

ferably to that of Almighty God, if we ſincerely love him above all Things.

However, we muſt obſerve, that this Intention, though never ſo pure, of pleaſing God in every Thing, cancels not the Obligation we have of contenting and pleaſing one another, according to the Order eſtabliſhed by Almighty God. Servants are doubtleſs bound to endeavour to pleaſe their Maſters, Children their Parents, and married Perſons owe this Duty reciprocally to each other. But my Meaning is, that we are bound to comply both with theſe and all other Duties, principally upon this Motive, becauſe Almighty God requires them of us: So that a ſincere Deſire to pleaſe God, and obey his Holy Will muſt always be the principal End even of thoſe Actions, whereby we ſeek to pleaſe and content one another.

I ſhall therefore conclude with this excellent Inſtruction our Saviour gave to the *Phariſees*, *hæc oportuit facere, & illa non omittere.* It behoveth us to do the one, and not omit the other. We muſt imitate the *Phariſees* ſo far as to be exact with them in the Performance of all outward Duties, that by our good Example, we may mutually encourage one another in Piety and Virtue: But we muſt alſo be careful to rectify our Hearts by a ſincere Intention and effectual

effectual Deſire to pleaſe God, and obey his holy Will in the Performance of them: We muſt follow them in a diligent Practice of the Duties of the Religion we profeſs; but we muſt avoid their Oſtentation, Arrogance, and Pride. Finally, we muſt imitate their Zeal for the Converſion of Souls, their Juſtice in paying to every one what is due to him, and their Charity to the Poor: But we muſt beware of their Uncharitableneſs in judging, cenſuring, or deſpiſing our Neighbour. And thus our Virtue will now abound more than theirs, and our Reward be proportioned to it hereafter.

The XLIVth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Danger of Luke-warmneſs.

I would thou wert either cold or hot. But becauſe thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to ſpue thee out of my Mouth. Rev. iii. 15, 16.

THESE Words repreſent the Dangerous Condition of luke-warm Chriſtians: For they import no leſs, than that the

the State of Tepidity, tho' abſolutely preferable to that of profeſs'd Libertines, is attended with ſome Dangers, in which the other is not concern'd; and is in Effect ſo diſpleaſing to Almighty God, that he theatens the luke-warm with an eternal Separation from him. This is the Truth I intend to make out in this Entertainment. But leaſt Perſons of a ſcrupulous Conſcience ſhould by Miſtake appropriate to themſelves, what belongs no ways to them, becauſe their State is diametrically oppoſite to that of Tepidity; I ſhall firſt draw out at large the Character of a tepid or luke-warm Chriſtian, that they who are concern'd, may ſee themſelves in it, and they who are not, may not be frighten'd with Dangers, which are at the greateſt Diſtance from them.

St. *Anſelm* has epitomized the whole Character of a luke-warm Chriſtian in this ſhort Sentence. *Tepidus eſt, qui inter Virtutes et Vitia fluctuat.* He is one that wavers between Virtue and Vice: For he is in a kind of middle State between the *Zealous* or *devout Chriſtian* on the one Hand, and *looſe Livers* on the other; being neither bad enough to be counted *Vicious* in the Eyes of the World, nor Good enough to be truly *Virtuous* in the Sight of God. He Aims to ſerve two Maſters

Maſters at once, and divide himſelf equally between God and the World, ſo as to gratify Nature with all the Conveniences and Pleaſures of this Life, without forfeiting his Title to the Rewards of the next: For his chief Buſineſs is to purchaſe Heaven at as eaſy a Rate as is poſſible, and renounce no more of preſent Satisfaction for it than he muſt needs. This makes him always inquiſitive to know the exact Limits of any Obligation; and tho' there appears in this a Concern not to tranſgreſs, it proceeds however, from an ill Root, *viz.* a Fear of Over-doing. So that whereas Perſons of a tender Conſcience are commonly apprehenſive of falling ſhort of their Duty, the tepid Chriſtian's greateſt Care is never to go beyond it; and he is always more afraid to do too much than too little.

It is true, he expreſſes an Abhorrence of walking in the *broad Way*; becauſe the Goſpel declares it leads to Hell and everlaſting Perdition, which he ſays he is reſolved to avoid: But he is for enlarging the *narrow Way* as much as may be; and for that Purpoſe is always provided with a good Stock of Caſes that favour Liberty, and may ſerve upon Occaſion to bring his Conſcience over to his Inclinations: For ſince he knows himſelf obliged under Pain

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of eternal Damnation, to keep both the Commandments of God, and Precepts of the Church; therefore to prevent his being too uneaſy under the Burthen, he uſually endeavours by forced Interpretations to accommodate them ſo to corrupt Nature, that Conſcience and Self-Love may be both ſatisfied at once. In a Word, the higheſt Pitch of Virtue he aſpires to, is to avoid great Crimes and *mortal Sins:* But as to *venial Sins*, he is ſure they will never damn him; and for his Part, he's not ambitious to be a canonized Saint, but will be ſatisfied with any Place in Heaven; ſo that if any Diſpute ariſes betwixt his Conſcience and his Inclinations, he examines not whether the Matter in Queſtion be lawful or unlawful, but whether it be a venial or mortal Sin. If he judges it to be but venial, his Inclination generally carries it againſt his Duty.

But the main Principle he pretends to govern himſelf by, and which gives the moſt plauſible Colour to his Actions, is, that *all Virtue conſiſts in a Mean*; that Extremes of any kind are blameable, and every Thing ought to be done with Moderation: For he pretends to be a great Lover of moderate Ways, as being both leſs dangerous and more laſting: And without all Diſpute it is the Golden Rule of

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human Life, if not abuſed by Miſapplication: For the very beſt Principles, if taken by the wrong Handle, may lead to the moſt dangerous Errors. And ſo it happens in the Caſe of the luke-warm Chriſtian, who pretending to ſteer his Courſe to Heaven in a middle Way between *Bigotry* and *Libertiniſm*, generally miſtakes his Way, and ſtrikes upon one of the Rocks he pretends to avoid: Becauſe judging of Things by Inclination, which always favours the looſer Side, he often takes that for the middle Way, which borders very cloſe upon the worſt of the two Extremes; and ſo for Fear of Erring a little on the *Right Side*, he commonly goes a great deal out of his Way towards the *Left*.

As for Inſtance, profeſs'd Libertines ſtick at nothing, but let looſe the Reins to all their irregular Appetites, without any Regard to Duty or Conſcience; and this without all Diſpute is the Extremity of Wickedneſs. Devout and zealous Chriſtians are on the contrary, not only ſolicitous to ſatisfy all Duties of Obligation, and avoid whatever is prohibited under Pain of eternal Damnation, but often go ſome Steps beyond the literal Injunction of the Precept; practiſe many Works of Supererogation, and mortify their Humours even in Things that are indifferent. Now this the

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tepid Chriſtian looks upon as a high ſtrain of Bigotry, and therefore only pretends to keep in what he calls his *middle Way* between theſe two.

I ſhall exemplify in the Duty of *Faſting*, which has two Branches: *Firſt*, to abſtain from Fleſh; and *Secondly*, to eat but one Meal; both which being troubleſome to Nature, any ſlight Indiſpoſition, which he may magnify to his Phyſician or Director, as he pleaſes, ſerves for a ſufficient Pretence to plead for a Diſpenſation; which being obtain'd, his Conſcience as well as Body is at Eaſe. But if there be no manner of Pretence for a Diſpenſation, and this troubleſome Taſk muſt needs be performed, he ſtudies at leaſt to make it as eaſy as he can within the Limits of the Precept. So that what with good large Allowances both in the Morning and at Night, and the Liberty he gives himſelf over and above of Drinking betwixt Meals as much as upon other Days, he ſtrains the Commandments as far as he thinks he may, without manifeſtly breaking it: And this he calls his *middle* or *moderate* Way between the extravagant Looſeneſs of profeſs'd Libertines, and the ſcrupulous Niceties of Devotees.

By the ſame Rule he ſquares the Method of his Devotions. As for Inſtance; the Church commands no other particular Du-

ty on Sundays and Holy-days, than that of hearing Maſs: Perſons of no Principles or Conſcience think it too much even to perform this eaſy Taſk: Devout and zealous Chriſtians on the contrary, are not ſatisfied with barely hearing Maſs, but ſpend a conſiderable Part of the Day in Praying, Reading, and ſuch like holy Exerciſes. But the tepid Chriſtian holds on in his *middle Way* between theſe two; and therefore, hears Maſs indeed, if he can do it with Eaſe; but having diſcharged this Duty, and perhaps in a very negligent Manner, he makes no Scruple to ſpend the reſt of the Day idly, and for the moſt part worſe than other Days; not reflecting that this cannot properly be called *Sanctifying the Day*; as is manifeſt to common Senſe.

Again, The Church obliges all to confeſs and communicate at *Eaſter*; ſuppoſing it will be every one's Concern to perform this Devotion as often as they ſhall be adviſed by their Directors. Now Libertines make as little Scruple to neglect this Duty as the former: Whereas zealous Chriſtians take Care to have Recourſe to the Fountains of Grace regularly at leaſt once a Month, and are ſolicitous to bring with them all the Diſpoſitions neceſſary to partake of the Bleſſings they contain. But the tepid Chriſtian thinks it too troubleſome a Taſk

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to be performed oftner than he muſt needs: Or, if he comes to the Sacraments once every half Year or Quarter, 'tis generally with ſuch a lame Preparation, that it were perhaps better for him not to come at all. For, though once a Quarter be, abſolutely ſpeaking, too ſeldom, yet once a Year is too often to abuſe the Sacraments: And truly there is Ground enough to fear, that one who conſults his Eaſe, and follows the Dictates of Sloth in every Thing that has a Relation to the Concerns of his Soul, has as many Sacrileges to anſwer for, as he makes Confeſſions and Communions in that luke-warm State.

But 'tis no Wonder the tepid Chriſtian ſhould thus make bold with the Precepts of the Church, ſince he treats the Goſpel no better. Chriſt commands us to *ſeek firſt the Kingdom of God.* Now profligate Sinners live as if they had no Faith of a future State; whereas zealous Chriſtians ſhew plainly in the whole Conduct of their Lives, that they have nothing ſo much at Heart as the Salvation of their Souls; for the ſecuring whereof, they ſtudy to pleaſe God in all their Actions, avoid the dangerous Liberties of the World, and deprive themſelves, as far as their Circumſtances will permit, of every Thing they apprehend to be an Obſtacle to it: But the tepid Chriſtian

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keeps on in his *middle Way* between theſe two; which pretended middle Way, is in Effect, the broad Way of the World: For if indulging Sloth and Idleneſs; if living without Rule or Method; if being govern-ed by Caprice and Humour, running into modiſh Extravagances, and paſſing Day after Day in a Circle of dangerous or tri-fling Amuſements, cannot, without ſhock-ing common Senſe, be call'd *ſeeking firſt the Kingdom of God*, then this *middle Way* be-twixt Vice and Devotion, in which the luke-warm Chriſtian walks, can be no o-ther, than the *broad Way*, which the Goſ-pel tells us, leads to everlaſting Perdition.

I ſhall now ſum up the principal Heads of what has been ſaid; that we may have a full View of his Character all at once. A luke-warm Chriſtian then is one, whoſe Life is neither edifying, nor notoriouſly ſcan-dalous. He is full of ſinful Defects, and takes little Care to correct them: In the diſcharge of Duties, whether of Prayer, Faſting, or frequenting the Sacraments, he generally has a Regard to his Eaſe; and therefore, performs them ſo by halves, that they turn to very little Account. He makes nothing of venial Sins, and ſeldom denies himſelf any Thing, that appears lawful in itſelf: He follows the common Tract of the World, without running into its groſſeſt Irregularities,

Irregularities, and encroaches upon the Commandments, as far as he thinks he may without tranſgreſſing in any thing notoriouſly criminal. He never aſpires to any Degree of Perfection, and therefore never comes near it; and his very beſt Works are commonly ſo faulty, that their Defects outweigh their Merit. In a word, he uſes his Soul as unmercifully as a Miſer uſes his Body; endeavouring to keep it juſt alive and no more.

Now, though this be the general Character of a luke-warm Chriſtian; yet every Part of it is not equally applicable to all: For Tepidity has many Branches, and every Branch its ſeveral Degrees; and by conſequence, of thoſe that are concerned, ſome are leſs guilty than others. Let every one then take to himſelf the Part that belongs to him: For by that he may in ſome Meaſure judge in what Degree of Danger his eternal Concerns are: But if any one upon viewing the Picture I have drawn, finds it reſembles him in every Feature, he may conclude his State is full of Danger. The main Drift of this Diſcourſe is to convince him of this Truth; and though the Hints I have already given, particularly relating to the Abuſe of the Sacraments, might ſuffice, I ſhall now add ſome farther Proofs, to render him ſenſible of it.

I have obſerved in the Beginning of my Diſcourſe, that theſe Words of St. *John*, *I would thou wert cold or hot*, &c. import no leſs, than that the State of Tepidity, though abſolutely preferable to that of Vice, is yet attended with ſome Dangers, in which the other is not concerned. It is this I ſhall now endeavour to make out, by ſhewing in the firſt Place, that a luke-warm Chriſtian may eaſily imagine himſelf to be in God's Favour, when he really is in mortal Sin; whereas the palpable Diſorders of a Perſon given to Vice, reſcue him at leaſt from this Deluſion; and in this Reſpect the Condition of the one, is as much worſe than that of the other as a hidden Diſtemper is more dangerous than one that diſcovers itſelf by manifeſt Symptoms; becauſe the very Diſcovery of a Diſtemper is at leaſt one Step towards its Cure.

Now, that a luke-warm Chriſtian is in great Danger of falling under this Deluſion, is manifeſt from the very Caſe of the Biſhop of *Laodicea*, to whom the Words of my Text were addreſs'd by St. *John*. For this unfortunate Perſon not only thought himſelf in the State of Grace, but even rich in Merits: And yet Almighty God, the Searcher of Hearts, reveal'd to St. *John*, that his Soul was in a moſt lamentable State; and therefore order'd his Apoſtle to write thus

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to him: *Thou ſay'ſt thou art rich, and encreaſed with Goods, and thou know'ſt not, that thou art wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked:* Which Expreſſions carry doubtleſs too terrible a Weight to mark out any other State than that of mortal Sin.

And has not every luke-warm Chriſtian, tho' like the Biſhop, he perhaps feels not his Conſcience charg'd with any Thing that is criminal; has he not, I ſay, Reaſon enough to apply thoſe Words to himſelf, and ſuſpect they deſcribe exactly his Caſe; 'twill appear he has, if we but reflect that the Biſhop was tax'd with nothing but Tepidity; and that this alone had conſumed all his ſpiritual Treaſure, and reduced him to the miſerable Nakedneſs and Poverty deſcribed by St. *John.* For ſince like Cauſes produce naturally like Effects; does it not follow, that where there is a Reſemblance in the one, we may juſtly fear there is ſo in the other?

This alone ſuffices to ground a reaſonable Fear, that all luke-warm Chriſtians are more or leſs concern'd in the Biſhop's Caſe; and that like him they are not only *poor* and *naked*, but alſo *blind* enough to think themſelves otherwiſe: I ſhall however, produce ſome probable Reaſons, both for the one and the other, from the very Nature

of Tepidity, and the principal Branches of it's Character.

And *First*, as to the negligent and heedleſs Temper of a luke-warm Chriſtian, this alone may eaſily betray him to many Sins, whereby God's Grace is forfeited, and that without his being aware of it. 1. To many Sins of *Omiſſion*; which are chiefly occaſion'd by Heedleſneſs and Want of Care. 2. To numberleſs Sins of the *Tongue*; which can only be prevented by a conſtant Reſtraint and Watchfulneſs upon that reſtleſs Member; and 3. to many Sins of *Thought?* as raſh Judgments, unlawful Deſires, *&c.* which thoſe who are not over-careful to obſerve the Motions of their Hearts, will eaſily become guilty of.

Then if we conſider the innumerable Snares, the Devil has every where ready to intrap the heedleſs and unwary Chriſtian, how is it poſſible but his Neglect and Want of Care muſt needs render him obnoxious to many of them, ſince even the moſt cautious and wary can ſcarce eſcape being ſometimes ſurpriſed? Suppoſe a Man ſhould walk with a great Weight upon him in a ſlippery Place full of Holes and Precipices, would he not be every Moment in Danger of his Life, unleſs he pick'd and choſe his Way with all the Care imaginable? Now the World is full of Traps, Snares and dangerous

gerous Precipices, and we carry the Weight of corrupt Nature every where with us; nay, and the Devil is over and above ready to puſh us down at every Step; and can a Perſon, that walks heedleſsly amidſt ſo many Dangers, pretend to eſcape without many Falls? 'Tis true, he often feels them not, and that completes his Misfortune, and makes good what I have ſaid, *viz.* That he may often be in mortal Sin and not know it; becauſe the ſame Neglect that occaſions his falling into many Sins, makes him often overlook them, and paſs them by unobſerved.

But, if we likewiſe conſider the ſmall Account a luke-warm Chriſtian makes of venial Sins, and his aiming no higher than to avoid ſuch as are mortal, this is ſo dangerous a Diſpoſition, that whoever is concern'd in it will find, in the making up of his laſt Accounts, that he has play'd Booty againſt his own Soul, and been only induſtrious to cheat himſelf: For how can it be imagined, that one who affects to be always venturing to the very Brink of a Precipice ſhall not ſometimes ſlip into it; or that a Perſon ever diſpoſed to encroach upon the Commandments as far as he thinks he may without tranſgreſſing mortally, ſhall not often miſtake his Aim, and go beyond the Bounds he propoſes to himſelf?

From all which Reaſons it plainly follows, that a luke-warm Chriſtian may eaſily imagine himſelf to be in God's Favour, when he really is in mortal Sin; which, as I told you, is the firſt Reaſon why his Condition may in ſome Reſpects be ſaid to be more dangerous, even than that of open Vice.

The *Second* is, becauſe, conſidering the Nature of his Diſtemper, he is in greater Danger of always continuing in the ſame State: For whereas barefaced Vice is of itſelf a Reproach to the Party concern'd, and his guilty Conſcience is every now and then apt to give him ſuch uneaſy Thoughts, as may in Time help to work him into a Deſire of changing his Condition; the luke-warm Chriſtian on the contrary, being rarely concern'd in any viſible Diſorder, imagines all is well, and thinks of nothing leſs than a Change of Life: For not perceiving any Thing conſiderably amiſs in himſelf, he is very well ſatisfied with the State he is in: Nay, many Times takes no ſmall Vanity in comparing himſelf with the Libertine, and wonders how Men can be ſo wicked: Thus inſtead of humbling himſelf, and daily lamenting his Sins before Almighty God, he rather takes a certain ſecret Pride in judging himſelf much better than his Neighbour; and we may eaſily conclude there is but little Proſpect of Amendment

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in a Perſon, who has not yet made the firſt Step towards it, by being ſenſible of the Danger he is in; not reflecting that the *Slothful Servant* mention'd in the Goſpel, was condemn'd, tho' he had no other Crime but *Sloth* laid to his Charge: And thus the luke-warm Chriſtian uſually runs on in joining Hopes of Salvation with a State perhaps inconſiſtent with it, till Death opens his Eyes, and undeceives him when it is too late.

But before I make an End, I muſt turn my Diſcourſe for a few Moments to another Sort of Chriſtians, as oppoſite to thoſe I have hitherto ſpoken of, as Fire is to Water; I mean Perſons of a ſcrupulous Conſcience; who out of an exceſſive Fear are apt to take to themſelves every Thing that is ſaid only to alarm looſe Livers into a Senſe of their dangerous State. By Perſons of a ſcrupulous Conſcience I mean thoſe, who tho' they have a ſincere Deſire to ſerve God, and an earneſt Solicitude to ſave their Souls, are always upon the Rack, and diſſatisfied with every Thing they do. If they be aſſaulted by any Temptation, they conclude immediately they have conſented to it, tho' they really deteſt it in their Hearts: Their Prayers, Confeſſions, and Communions, tho' perform'd with a Seriouſneſs and Application, with which they ought to be at

Eaſe, are all wrong in their diſtemper'd Imaginations.

Now whatever Perſons have been ſeriouſly and frequently aſſured by their Directors, that they are concern'd in this Weakneſs, (for 'tis of theſe alone I ſpeak) theſe, I ſay, ought to be no more alarm'd with what they read or hear concerning the dangerous State of luke-warm Chriſtians, than if they ſhould hear a warm Invective againſt the moſt ſcandalous Vices practiſed in the World, of which they certainly know themſelves not guilty: For let them but conſider every Part of the luke-warm Chriſtian's Character, and they will find it to be as far from repreſenting their Caſe, as the Picture of a *Camel* is from repreſenting a *Gnat*.

A ſupine Neglect in the Concerns of Salvation is the Characteriſtick Sin of the Luke-warm; whereas an exceſſive Solicitude is, on the contrary, the Fault of the Scrupulous. The Luke-warm lay themſelves open to many great Sins, by contemning thoſe that are venial; but the Scrupulous are, on the contrary, under a continual panick Terror, and as the *Pſalmiſt*, deſcribes them, *trembling there with Fear, where there is no Ground of Fear.* The Luke-warm conſult their Eaſe in all Duties relating both to Prayer, Faſting, and the Sacraments; whereas

whereas the Scrupulous make them a meer Rack of Conſcience, and an inſupportable Burden to their Souls. The Luke-warm are as ſlothful Servants doing every Thing by Halves; and the Scrupulous are like drudging Slaves, perpetually Sweating and Groaning under the ſweet Yoke of *Jeſus Chriſt*. Finally, the Luke-warm are but too apt to preſume upon God's Goodneſs, whereas the Scrupulous ſeem to regard Almighty God as an unmerciful Taſk-maſter, or one that lies upon the Catch to find Fault, and reſolved to pardon them nothing.

I know but one Point, in which theſe oppoſite Diſtempers ſeem to have a Reſemblance; I mean, the Difficulty of their Cure; though the Cauſe of this Difficulty in the one, is wholly different from that in the other. The uſual Root of it in ſcrupulous Perſons is a ſtrong Prepoſſeſſion, that their Director does not underſtand them right, and thinks them better than they really are; and that by conſequence they cannot depend upon his Advice; which certainly is the ſubtleſt Stratagem the Devil can employ to perpetuate the Diſturbances and Anxieties of theſe pious Souls, and render uſeleſs the ordinary Means appointed by Almighty God for their Cure; becauſe it deprives them of the Comfort

and Aſſiſtance of the Perſon, by whoſe Advice alone they can be cured. Now all I can ſay to this whimſical Pretext (but I ſay it with all the Aſſurance imaginable) is, that when a Penitent has for ſeveral Times laid open the State of his Conſcience with all the Candor and Sincerity he is capable of, 'tis morally impoſſible his Confeſſor ſhould miſtake his Caſe, or form a wrong Judgment of him. They who are free from Scruples, and, by conſequence, the beſt Judges in the Caſe in Queſtion, are fully convinced of this Truth; and if Perſons darkened with Fears and Apprehenſions, will not ſubmit to the Judgment of thoſe, who ſee Things in a clear Light, 'tis a Sign they reſolve not to be cured. But if they are ſtill willing to receive Advice, the beſt Thing they can do to be delivered from this racking Evil, is to pay an humble Obedience to their Director in every Thing relating to their Diſtemper: And in order to diſpoſe themſelves by Degrees to this entire Submiſſion, they muſt be heartily convinced of the following Truths.

1. That Scrupuloſity is no commendable Quality, nor a Help to Devotion, but a great Hinderance to it.

2. That there are dangerous *Exceſſes* as well as *Defects* in Devotion; and that over-doing

doing is a Fault as well as falling ſhort in any Duty whatſoever.

3. That they ought not to regard Almighty God as a cenſorious Spy upon Men's Actions, but as an indulgent Father, full of Tenderneſs and Compaſſion, particularly to thoſe, who ſeek ſincerely to pleaſe him.

4. That the Yoke of Chriſt is not a tyrannical Law impoſed to oppreſs Conſciences, but to conduct Men with Comfort and Safety in their Way to Heaven.

5. That a Conſcience darkened with Fears and Scruples, is a treacherous Guide, and never to be truſted to.

6. That to follow the Judgment of Directors, which is acting according to God's Appointment, is both ſafer, and more eaſily anſwered to God, than to be governed by their own Wills and Fancies.

And laſtly, that the plauſible Pretext of not being underſtood, or thought better than they are by their Directors, is a Snare of the Devil, intending thereby to perpetuate their Diſturbances, and render them incurable.

Now to return to the Luke-warm, who ſtand more in Need of Cauſticks than Lenitives; the beſt Advice I can give them is to meditate frequently upon *Death*, *Judgment*, the *Eternity of Hell-fire*, the ſmall Number

Number of the Elect, and other ſevere Truths of the Goſpel, which may frighten them into a Senſe of their Condition, convince them of their Danger, and make them reſolve upon a ſerious Amendment of their Lives.

The XLVth ENTERTAINMENT.

Of Spiritual Martyrdom.

He that loveth his Life, ſhall loſe it.
John xii. 25.

THESE Words of Chriſt are applicable to all the glorious Martyrs, whoſe Feaſts are yearly ſolemnized by the Church: For they truly loved their Lives, in ſhedding their Blood for the Honour and Intereſt of their heavenly Maſter; and in ſo doing, gave the ſtrongeſt Proof of the ardent Deſire they had to be united for ever to him; ſince they were willing to purchaſe that Happineſs with the bittereſt Torments, and the Loſs of their Lives.

But how can ordinary Chriſtians imitate the heroick Virtue of theſe Champions of Chriſt? *Firſt*, every one is bound to be heartily

heartily diſpoſed to lay down his Life for God's Sake, if he ſhould be pleaſed to demand that Sacrifice of him; and thus he becomes a Martyr, at leaſt in Preparation of Mind: But, *Secondly*, beſides that Martyrdom, which is accompliſhed with Effuſion of Blood and the Loſs of Life, there is a ſpiritual one, made up partly of the Mortification of our Senſes, and partly of interior Sufferings, by which the Will or inward Man is afflicted and mortified, inſtead of the Body; and every Chriſtian will meet with almoſt daily Occaſions of ſuffering this Martyrdom, if he will but ſtrive to live up to his Character, and diſcharge the moſt eſſential Duties of it: His own Inclinations, and the general Corruption of the World, will furniſh him with Trials enough to exerciſe his Patience, and render his Life a continual Combat; as I ſhall endeavour to ſhew in this Diſcourſe, wherein I intend to give you ſome Account of this ſpiritual Martyrdom, and ſhew how every one is bound to aſpire to it; *firſt*, by dying to himſelf; and, *ſecondly*, by dying to the World.

The Word *Martyr* ſignifies any ſort of Witneſs; but common Uſe has appropriated it to ſignify only ſuch a Sort of Witneſs as by his Sufferings gives Evidence for the Truth of the Goſpel: And there-

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fore all thoſe that have ſealed the Faith of Chriſt with their Blood, are by the Church called *Martyrs*; becauſe, by laying down their Lives, they gave publick Teſtimony, and became authentick Witneſſes of the Truth of the Faith they profeſs'd: But ſince the Occaſions of this Martyrdom are now but rare, the Generality of Chriſtians are no otherwiſe concerned in it than in Preparation of Heart: I ſay, in *Preparation of Heart*, becauſe all are bound to be ſo diſpoſed as to be ready to lay down their Lives rather than renounce their Faith, or abandon the Cauſe of Juſtice: For whoever is not ready to ſacrifice all he poſſeſſes in the World, rather than offend God mortally, has the Teſtimony of his own Conſcience againſt him, that there is ſomething in the World he loves more than God, and that by conſequence he is already guilty of a mortal Tranſgreſſion againſt the firſt and greateſt Commandment of the Law, which is *to love God above all Things.*

But, as I have already told you, there is another Sort of Martyrdom or Suffering for Chriſt, the Obligation whereof being grounded upon the very Covenant we made with God, and ſwore to at our Baptiſm, is wholly inſeparable from the Character of a Chriſtian; and therefore begins to affect us as ſoon as we attain to the

the perfect Uſe of Reaſon, and only ends with our Lives. This Martyrdom conſiſts chiefly in the Mortification of the Will, and its Dying to all the Luſts and irregular Inclinations of corrupt Nature, and ſo is properly call'd an *Evangelical* or *Spiritual* Death. 'Tis call'd a *Spiritual* Death, becauſe it is properly the Effect of the Spirit combating within us, and mortifying the Deſires of the Fleſh; 'tis alſo call'd an *Evangelical* Death, becauſe all the moral Precepts and Maxims of the Goſpel have a Reference to it, and inſtruct us in the Method of it. And therefore whoever has the Patience and Courage to perſevere his whole Life in thus dying to himſelf, may properly be call'd a Martyr of the Goſpel; becauſe by ſo doing he gives evident Teſtimony, that he is throughly and practically convinced of the Truth and Holineſs of its Doctrine.

But to give ſome farther Account of the proper Nature of this evangelical or ſpiritual Death, I cannot ſet it in a clearer Light, than by ſhewing how in all its Effects it reſembles thoſe which a corporal Death produces in the Body: For in the firſt Place, as violent Pains and certain Struglings between Soul and Body, are the uſual Forerunners and Attendants of a corporal Death; ſo this ſpiritual Death is not to be

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attain'd to, without a long and painful Combat betwen the Spirit and the Fleſh. For, as St. *Paul* tells us, *the Fleſh luſteth againſt the Spirit, and the Spirit againſt the Fleſh, and theſe are contrary the one to the other.* So that whoever reſolves in earneſt to die to himſelf, muſt begin with uſing Violence to his natural Inclinations, in order to maſter by Degrees this Oppoſition of the Fleſh to the Spirit; ſince Death without Conflict is as unuſual in the Order of Grace, as in the Order of Nature; and whereas this Strife or Combat againſt our natural Inclinations, is the moſt painful Part of the ſpiritual Martyrdom we have to ſuffer, whoever pretends to enter the Liſt, muſt prepare himſelf for it with great Courage and Reſolution. He muſt conſider that Man's Life is a *Warfare upon Earth*; that he has liſted himſelf under Chriſt's Standard, and that in this ſpiritual War, as well as others, Fighting is the only Way to Victory and Triumph. He muſt not therefore be ſtartled at the obſtinate Reſiſtance he may meet with either from old Habits, or a ſtubborn Temper, but readily embrace all the Means neceſſary to conquer himſelf: And he muſt remember that if his Combat be great, his Reward and Crown will be proportion'd to it.

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The ſecond Effect, wherein this ſpiritual Death reſembles the corporal one is, that as this puts an End to all Communication between Soul and Body, ſo the proper Effect of a ſpiritual Death, is to break off that Correſpondence with the Fleſh, which is only entertain'd by thoſe, who therefore are properly call'd ſenſual or carnal Men. This is the expreſs Doctrine of St. *Paul*, Rom. viii. where he diſcourſes thus: *They who are after the Fleſh, do mind the Things of the Fleſh, and they who are after the Spirit, do the Things of the Spirit. But ye are not in the Fleſh, but in the Spirit, if ſo be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. For if ye live after the Fleſh, ye ſhall Die; but if through the Spirit, ye mortify the Deeds of the Fleſh, ye ſhall live.*

By which Words, St. *Paul* gives us to underſtand, that a Chriſtian, who is dead to the Inclinations of corrupt Nature, is ſo govern'd by the Spirit, as to renounce all ſinful Correſpondence with the Fleſh. And therefore in the 6th Chapter of the ſame Epiſtle, having exhorted the *Romans* to conſider themſelves *as dead to Sin*, he explains himſelf thus, *let not Sin therefore reign in your mortal Body, ſo as to obey the Luſts thereof*; which is as much as to ſay, that he who is dead to Sin, yields not to the Solicitations of the Fleſh; but conſider-

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ing it as an Enemy to God, declares War againſt it, is watchful to avoid its Snares, and rejects all its Temptations with Horror. For this is to be truly dead to Sin, and to have broken off all ſuch Correſpondence with the Fleſh, as is contrary to the Law of God.

For as long as the Soul is united to a mortal Body, and acts by the Miniſtry of the Senſes, 'tis impoſſible we ſhould be free from ſenſible Impreſſions; this being a Privilege reſerved for the Life to come, when the happy Change of our State will deliver us from its Corruption, and reſcue us not only from Sin, but all Temptations to it. However, as long as the Soul keeps the Reins in her own Hands, and is ſo far Miſtreſs of the Will, as never to entertain any ſinful Suggeſtion voluntarily, nor act upon any ſinful Impreſſion, there is no illegal Correſpondence with the Fleſh; nor can the Soul in this Caſe be ſaid to be alive to Sin, tho' ſhe be never ſo ſtrongly ſolicited by it; becauſe the Life of the Soul is in the Will, and as long as this yields not, but remains immoveable to Sin, ſo long we are morally dead to it. So that as yielding to the Solicitations of corrupt Nature is an undoubted Mark of a ſenſual Life prevailing in us, ſo there cannot be a better Proof of the ſpiritual Death I ſpeak of,

of, than to remain unmoved under all its moſt violent and repeated Aſſaults.

Theſe are ſometimes the Effects of natural Conſtitution, and are apt to raiſe ſuch dark Miſts about the Soul as hinder her from ſeeing herſelf, and diſtinguiſhing between Suggeſtion and Conſent; but they are much oftner the Remains of paſt Habits of Sin: And therefore the Parties thus concerned, muſt not be either ſurpriſed or diſhearten'd at the Frequency or Violence of ſuch Aſſaults; on the contrary, they muſt expect them, and prepare themſelves accordingly: Nor need they fear any Prejudice from them to their Souls, if they neither occaſion them by ſome freſh Fault, nor entertain them with deliberate Reflection; for tho' the wilful Diſorders of their Lives paſt be in ſome Meaſure the Source of their Temptations, yet it being ſuppoſed that they are now retracted by a ſincere Repentance, and become the Objects of their Hatred and Deteſtation, all the Influence they have upon them is merely natural, and cannot affect them with a moral Guilt, which muſt always be voluntary either in itſelf or its Cauſe.

Now from this Effect of a ſpiritual Death there follows another, wherein it reſembles the corporal one: For as a corporal Death, by ſeparating the Soul from

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the Body, altho' it leaves the material Structure and Organs of the Senſes, yet deſtroys the Uſe they are deſigned for by Nature; ſo a ſpiritual Death, by the forementioned moral Separation of the Spirit from the Fleſh, altho' it leaves indeed the real Powers of *Hearing*, *Seeing*, *Taſting*, and ſo forth; yet it reſtrains the Uſe and Exerciſe of them to ſuch a Chriſtian Moderation, as to retrench all ſinful, dangerous, and even many ſuperfluous Acts: For a Chriſtian, who lives according to the Spirit, and truly deſires to die this ſpiritual Death, judges himſelf bound neither to gratify his Eyes with all ſorts of Objects, nor his Ears with all ſorts of Entertainments, nor his Palate farther than the Support of Nature, with a due Regard to Decency, requires: Neither does he only deny himſelf all ſinful Exceſſes, as frequenting ill Company; delighting himſelf with Diſcourſes offenſive to God, or injurious to his Neighbour; looking at immodeſt Objects; drinking beyond the Rules of Temperance, and the like; but he alſo refrains from many Diverſions and Pleaſures, that are wholly indifferent in themſelves; becauſe, tho' they be indifferent in themſelves, they are often dangerous in their Conſequence, by engaging the Heart in an immoderate Affection for them; and therefore

fore chooſes rather to deprive himſelf of them, than by enjoying them to expoſe himſelf to any Danger of offending Almighty God.

But I have now repreſented only one Part of the Martyrdom or Combat a Chriſtian has to ſuffer, ariſing from the Corruption and Perverſeneſs of his natural Inclinations, which, like rebellious Subjects, make a continual War upon him, and oblige him to thoſe Self-denials, without which they cannot be ſubdued: But beſides this inteſtine War with ourſelves, we have a no leſs troubleſome Conflict to ſuſtain from the Malice and Injuſtice of the World, which, with its Raileries or Perſecutions, is always ready to oppoſe the generous Deſigns of thoſe, who ſeriouſly reſolve to model their Lives by the Rules of the Goſpel.

As for Inſtance; if a Perſon, that has for a long Time practiſed all the modiſh Vices of the World, becomes, through God's Grace, ſenſible of the Danger of his State; and thereupon reſolves to quit his former Courſe of Life, begins to keep regular Hours, ſeparates himſelf from the Aſſemblies he uſed to frequent, addicts himſelf to Prayer, and other Duties of a Chriſtian Life; ſuch a Perſon muſt expect no Quarter from the World; it will treat

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him as a Deſerter, and be revenged of him for having abandon'd its Cauſe: He will be the Subject of Men's Jeſts, and brought upon the Stage at every Merry-meeting of his old Companions: If he has a weak Side, they will be ſure to find it out, and expoſe it in the broadeſt Light: They will put the worſt Conſtruction upon all his Actions, give an Aggravation to every Thing that may leſſen him, and a ſpiteful Turn to every Thing that ſhould recommend him. This is the Treatment a Chriſtian muſt prepare himſelf for, that has the Courage to bid Farewell to the modiſh Vices of the World, and embrace a Life conformable to the Maxims of the Goſpel.

We have another Inſtance hereof, relating to the Obligation all Chriſtians are under, of not revenging Injuries or Affronts: The Goſpel expreſly forbids to take Revenge, or return Evil for Evil; and the World preaches up a contrary Doctrine: If therefore, upon a Principle of Conſcience, and in Compliance with the Command of Chriſt, a Perſon puts up a conſiderable Affront, ſuffers it, as he ought to do, with a Chriſtian Patience, and demands no Satisfaction of the Author of it, he ſhall be poſted up for a Coward, and become the Scorn of all that ſtile themſelves Men of Honour. A terrible Temptation

tation to Fleſh and Blood! And yet it is beyond all Queſtion, that a Chriſtian is bound to ſuffer this, or any other unjuſt Reproach, rather than offend Almighty God: For our Saviour has expreſly forewarned us, that *whoever ſhall be aſhamed of him and his Words, of him ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he ſhall come in his Glory*; that is, whoever ſhall, through Shame or Fear of Men's Hatred or Contempt, conform himſelf to the ſinful Ways of the World, ſhall at the Laſt Day be diſown'd by Chriſt.

However, the Trial is yet harder, when the World threatens a Chriſtian not only with Deriſion and Scorn, but alſo with Loſs of Liberty and Forfeiture of Goods, in caſe he refuſes to comply with certain Propoſals, as the eſpouſing an unjuſt Cauſe, taking unlawful Oaths, and the like; which he cannot yield to, without wounding his Conſcience mortally: For here a frightful Scene of Miſery and Want, the Ruin of Children and Family, the numberleſs Temptations of Neceſſity, and a long Train of Sufferings, will preſent themſelves before his Eyes, and preſs hard upon him for a Compliance, as the only Means to prevent theſe Evils: And what then muſt a Chriſtian do in this hard Caſe? Our Saviour has fully anſwered the Queſtion

ſtion in theſe few Words: *If a Man cometh to me, and hateth not his Father and Mother, yea, and his own Life alſo, he cannot be my Diſciple.* It is plain then what Part a Chriſtian has to act; for he is certainly bound to give a deaf Ear to all the Solicitations of Intereſt and Eaſe alluring him on the one Hand, and the Terrors of Contempt and Poverty threatening him on the other: He muſt imitate the heroick Virtue of *Suſanna*, who, being tempted to Adultery, choſe Death itſelf, rather than ſtain her Soul with that Sin: *It is better* (ſaid ſhe) *to fall into the Hands of Men, than ſin in the Preſence of Almighty God.*

And tho' this ſeems a hard Leſſon to Nature, 'tis no more than what Men practiſe daily upon Motives even merely human, or even ſinful: For how many expoſe themſelves every where in the Service either of their own or ſome foreign Prince, to all the Hardſhips and Hazards of a bloody War, in which Impriſonment, the Loſs of a Limb, or Death itſelf, may be their Lot? And can it then be hard for a Chriſtian to ſuffer as much for God's Sake, and with the Certainty of an eternal Reward, as Men undergo upon very trivial Encouragements for one another? Again, how many ſacrifice their Honour and Eſtates, deſtroy their Health, ſhorten their Lives, and ruin both

both themſelves and their Families, merely to gratify an extravagant Humour, or ſome criminal Paſſion? And ought not then a Chriſtian to be at leaſt as bold and venturesome to pleaſe God, as Sinners are to pleaſe themſelves? Ought he not to give as ſignal Teſtimonies of his Zeal in a good Cauſe, as Sinners do of theirs in a Wicked one? The Caſe admits of no Diſpute, and it is a clear Proof of what I have ſaid, *viz.* that a Chriſtian's Life is a Life of Combat and Trial; and that every one, who makes the Goſpel his Rule, will have Sufferings enough to entitle him to the Honour of being a Martyr of it, tho' he neither ſheds his Blood, nor dies under the Hand of the Executioner: His Martyrdom is a Death indeed; but a Death, which only deſtroys the *Body of Sin:* It is a Martyrdom, which (as St. *Paul* deſcribes it) *crucifies the World to us, and us to the World:* Finally, 'tis a Martyrdom, whereof we ourſelves are the chief Inſtruments and Executioners, and which muſt laſt as long as we live.

I ſhall conclude my Diſcourſe with a neceſſary Reflection in Reference to the Parallel I have made; *viz.* that whereas a corporal Death is incapable of Degrees, becauſe one dead Body cannot be ſaid to be more dead than another; a ſpiritual

Death, on the contrary, admits of many Degrees, becauſe it is perfected in us by the ſame Degrees that the Life of Charity is improved in our Souls: It being certain, that the more we love God, the more we die to ourſelves. We muſt therefore make a large Difference between what is of indiſpenſable Obligation, and what only regards Perfection: As to what falls under indiſpenſable Obligation, every Chriſtian is bound to be ſo far dead to himſelf and the World, as to be heartily diſpoſed to ſacrifice all rather than offend God mortally; for whoever has not this Diſpoſition in his Heart, (and God ſees whether he has it or no) has not yet attained to that Degree of Charity, which conſiſts in an effectual Preference of God before all Things, and without which no Man can be ſaved.

But as to what regards the utmoſt Perfection of this ſpiritual Death, we are not bound to attain effectually to it; for then there would be no Diverſity of Manſions in Heaven: We ought however to deſire and endeavour it according to the Meaſure of our Strength, and to be ſtill making ſome nearer Approaches towards it; for if we be but ſtill moving forwards, we cannot fail of attaining at length to the Happineſs Almighty God has prepared for thoſe that love him ſincerely, and ſerve *him to the* utmoſt of their Power.

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The XLVIth ENTERTAINMENT.

Of Tempting GOD.

It is written, Thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Matt. iv. 7.

THIS was our Saviour's Anſwer to the ſecond Temptation of the Devil, who being baffled in his firſt Attempt upon Chriſt, was permitted to take him up to the Battlements of the Temple, and there ſuggeſted to him to throw himſelf headlong down; pretending, that by ſo doing he would ſhew his Confidence in God, who had promiſed that *his Angels would take care of him, and bear him up in their Hands, leſt at any time he ſhould daſh his Foot againſt a Stone:* But our Saviour ſoon ſilenced the Tempter with the aboveſaid Anſwer, *It is written, thou ſhalt not tempt the Lord thy God*; inſtructing us thereby, that tho' God has alſo charged his Angels to take care of us, this gives us no Privilege to neglect the ordinary Means of Safety; and that to do ſo, is *Tempting God.*

Now this contains a Leſſon both of great Importance and Extent; ſince not only every Chriſtian in the World is concerned

in it, but almoſt every Action of human Life may in ſome Meaſure take Directions from it; for it teaches us, that in all Concerns, whether of Soul or Body, we are bound to have Recourſe to the ordinary Methods appointed by Providence for their Preſervation or Improvement; and that whoever does otherwiſe, under Pretence of depending upon extraordinary Ways, incurs the Guilt of that Sin, which in Scripture-Language is called *Tempting God*: A Sin, which perhaps of all Sins in the World is moſt practiſed, and leaſt underſtood: The Subject then of this Diſcourſe ſhall be to mark out ſome of the moſt general Faults, whereby Men become guilty of it.

There are numberleſs Ways of *Tempting God*, by a culpable Neglect either of Soul or Body; for ſince Providence has charged us with the Care of both, we cannot ſatisfy this Obligation, unleſs we ſhew a reaſonable Solicitude in providing for the Good and Welfare both of the one and the other: However, ſince the Care of the Body is a Duty which Men are generally more apt to overſtrain than neglect, I ſhall confine my Diſcourſe to ſuch ſinful Neglects only as regard the Soul.

Firſt then, all thoſe ſtand charged with the Guilt of *Tempting God*, who are remarkably

markably negligent in the Duty of Prayer: The Reaſon is, becauſe Prayer is a general Remedy againſt Sin, and a general Means to obtain whatever Helps we ſtand in Need of: It is the Channel through which all Bleſſings from above are conveyed: It is the Key that gives us Acceſs to the Treaſures of Heaven: It is our Sword and Buckler in the Day of Battle, and our Security in Time of Peace: Finally, it is our ſtrongeſt Defence againſt Sin, the beſt Support of Virtue, and the daily Food and Refreſhment of our Souls; which therefore can no more maintain their ſpiritual Life without it, than the Body can ſubſiſt without a Competency of Nouriſhment and Reſt.

And are not they then, who neglect this holy Exerciſe, juſtly charged with the Guilt of *Tempting God?* For is it not evident, that they are either bent upon their own eternal Ruin, or have Preſumption enough to expect that God will aſſiſt them with his holy Grace, notwithſtanding their wilful Neglect of what Chriſt himſelf has expreſly appointed as a Means to obtain it: *Aſk*, (ſays Chriſt) *and ye ſhall receive; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and it ſhall be opened to you.* But theſe ſlothful Chriſtians will needs receive without aſking, and have Heaven opened to them without being

being at the Trouble of knocking: But they ſpeed, for the moſt Part, accordingly; for as they aſk not, ſo they receive not; and thus their Weakneſs encreaſing daily more and more upon them, and God forſaking them in the Day of Battle, they fall of courſe a Sacrifice to the Malice of their Enemies.

Secondly, All thoſe are guilty of *Tempting God*, who enter upon any State of Life without firſt endeavouring to ſecure to themſelves the Favour and Aſſiſtance of Heaven, by uſing all Chriſtian Means to diſpoſe themſelves for it: The Reaſon is, becauſe there is no State of Life, whether Publick or Private, Secular or Eccleſiaſtick, Solitary or in Society, but has ſo many Difficulties to ſtruggle with, and Duties to practiſe, that whatever Choice Men make, unleſs God gives a Bleſſing to it, nothing can be expected, but a long Train of Miſcarriages in this Life, and endleſs Miſeries hereafter.

And how is this Bleſſing to be procured, but by the Uſe of ſuch Means as God has appointed? For if they conſult his holy Will with an unfeigned Sincerity of Heart; if they implore his Aid with humble and hearty Prayers; if they do nothing without the Advice of Perſons fit to be conſulted in a Buſineſs of that Moment; finally,

nally, if they lay aſide all Motives ſuggeſted by corrupt Nature, and aim chiefly at God's Honour, and the ſaving of their Souls; ſuch preparatory Diſpoſitions as theſe cannot fail of engaging Heaven, both to direct them in the Choice of their State, and aſſiſt them in diſcharging all the Duties of it.

But, alas! how few take this Method, or even do any Thing that comes near it? Let but the cuſtomary Way of Perſons entering into the Bonds of Wedlock be an Inſtance of it: For how is it young Perſons uſually proceed in this important Undertaking? Do they make it their chief Concern to diſcover and obey the Will of God? Is the Proſpect of moſt likely ſecuring in that Way their eternal Intereſt, the principal Motive that determines them to it? Is every Thing done regularly, and with a due Regard both to Decency and the eſtabliſhed Laws of the Church? Finally, is Care taken that the Bleſſing of their heavenly Father, and a large Portion of his holy Grace, without which they cannot be truly happy, be not wanting?

Nothing leſs than all this: For, *firſt*, as to the Motive that determines them in their Choice, 'tis for the moſt Part purely human; their Thoughts being either wholly confined to worldly Conſiderations, or aim-

ing no farther than to gratify a preſent Inclination. Hence the Concerns of the other World are uſually left to take their Chance; and the Will of God, which ſhould have been conſulted in the firſt Place, is either paſs'd by wholly unregarded, or only made uſe of as a Cover to Intereſt, or other Motives: For tho' his holy Will be many Times pretended, it is, in effect, the Will of Fleſh and Blood has the whole Management of the Undertaking; as is very evident, particularly in their Caſe, who, purpoſely declining the Advice of Parents or Friends, carry Things on with an affected Secrecy, engage themſelves Hand over Head by private Contracts, and the better to proſecute their under-hand Deſigns, ſtick not to tell a thouſand ſtudied Lies, back'd many Times with Oaths and Execrations, to deceive thoſe that might adviſe them, or inform them of the Will of God, if they had a Mind to know it. But this is not their Buſineſs; if the preſent Paſſion be but ſatified, 'tis all they aim at: And what can it avail them after this to make ſome Applications to God, when the whole Buſineſs is in effect concluded without him, and carried on ſo far, that there is no going back without Violence to Juſtice and the Laws of God? For can they think he will give a Bleſſing to a Work

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thus raſhly undertaken, or by an After-Approbation become an Abettor of their Irregularities?

And therefore they reap, for the moſt Part, as they have ſowed; and their uſual Portion is a long Train of inſuperable Difficulties and Sorrows, endleſs Diſputes and Brawls, and, what is worſt of all, a fruitleſs Repentance; which uſually ending in mutual Averſions, not only makes their Lives a Hell upon Earth, but endangers their being unhappy in the Life to come: For, truly, 'tis no Wonder they ſhould proſper no better, when having, by their raſh and indiſcreet Engagement, juſtly forfeited the Bleſſing of their heavenly Father, and the proper Grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, they neither have Virtue to diſcharge their Duties, nor Strength to bear the Difficulties of their State; and ſo they ſink of courſe under the Weight of their Burden.

And are not thoſe then manifeſtly guilty of *Tempting God*, who, inſtead of doing their beſt to put themſelves under his Protection, are violently hurried on by Intereſt or Paſſion, to bind themſelves in an Engagement of the greateſt Concern? There can be not Doubt of it; ſince in ſo doing they muſt have the Preſumption to expect that God will favour them with his

holy Grace, whether they uſe any Endeavours to obtain it or not; which is wilfully neglecting the ordinary Means appointed, and withdrawing themſelves from the Order eſtabliſhed by him.

Thirdly, All thoſe *tempt God* in a very notorious Manner, who continue in their Sins, in Hopes of repenting in their laſt Sickneſs: The Reaſon is, becauſe a ſinful Life being the direct Road to everlaſting Perdition, to hope that ſuch a Life will terminate in a happy Death, is to expect to go to Heaven by walking on boldly in the Way that leads directly to Hell: And what is this but a moſt extravagant Preſumption? Since all the Grounds theſe Men can have to hope for Salvation is a vain Confidence the Devil inſpires them with, that tho' they run on in a Courſe of wilful Sins as long as Life and Health will permit, God will notwithſtanding have Compaſſion on them in their laſt Diſtreſs, and by the Power of an extraordinary Grace reſcue them from the Jaws of Hell juſt in the Nick of Time.

It is true, I cannot deny but ſuch a Thing may poſſibly happen, as it did in the Caſe of the good Thief: But ſince this muſt be the Effect of an extraordinary Grace, as I have fully proved in a former Diſcourſe, it follows, without all Diſpute,

that

that to depend poſitively upon it, and even to lay a Deſign of living on in Sin, is the ſame extravagant Preſumption as to expect that God will ſhew the greateſt Favour to thoſe that deſerve it leaſt, and be the moſt indulgent to the moſt impudent Sinners.

Some will perhaps aſk, why Sinners may not as eaſily repent in their laſt Sickneſs, as at any other Time? Nay, why a Death-bed Converſion may not be depended upon even with a greater Security than any other; ſince Men, in all likelihood, are never more in earneſt, than when they have Death immediately before their Eyes? I anſwer, *Firſt*, that this Way of arguing might have ſome Force, if either any Sinner could repent without the Help of God's Grace, or the moſt impudent of Sinners, ſuch as have put off their Converſion to the very laſt, could be ſaved without the Aſſiſtance of an extraordinary Grace.

I anſwer, *Secondly*, that if a mere *ſervile Fear* of Hell-fire ſufficed to reconcile a Sinner to God, a Death-bed Repentance might afford Security enough to one that has the Uſe of Reaſon to the laſt: For I can eaſily conceive, that a Perſon, who has lived wickedly, ſhould be ſeized with the greateſt Terror at the Approach of Death, and proteſt ſincerely that he repents of his Sins paſt, for fear of the Puniſh-

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ment they juſtly deſerve; as a Man led to Execution is ſorry for having been a Murderer or Thief: But ſince a true Converſion implies a Deteſtation of Sin preciſely for its own Sake, and as it is an Offence of God, which is a very different Motive from the former, I cannot eaſily conceive that a Perſon, who has deſpiſed God, and loved Sin for many Years together, ſhould all on a ſudden love the one and hate the other ſincerely, at a Time when he is in no Condition to employ the ordinary Means appointed by God to work this happy Change in his Soul.

Now this marks out the Difference between a Sinner in perfect Health, and one reduced to the laſt Extremity: For whilſt he is in perfect Health, whatever his Condition may be, he has Opportunity and Leiſure to work himſelf out of it by inſenſible Degrees: He has Time to pray, and read, and meditate, and perform all thoſe Exerciſes, which are the natural and uſual Means God's Grace makes uſe of to change a Sinner's Heart, and ſoften it into Compunction: And in all this there appears nothing extraordinary, but every Thing is done according to the regular Method appointed by the Divine Mercy for the Recovery of a Sinner, tho' never ſo deeply engaged in Habits of Sin.

But

But when ſuch a one is reduced to his laſt Sickneſs, the Caſe is quite alter'd; becauſe having ſinned as long as he could, and thereby both ſtrengthen'd his Enemy, and weaken'd himſelf to the utmoſt Degree; and, to encreaſe his Misfortune, having now neither Leiſure nor Opportunity, nor the Eaſe of Mind or Body, requiſite to perform thoſe Exerciſes that ſhould gradually work him into a better Diſpoſition, he is, by conſequence, under all the Diſadvantages imaginable of contributing any Thing towards his obtaining of Almighty God the powerful Aſſiſtance he ſtands ſo highly in Need of, and which alone can reſcue him from everlaſting Ruin: And therefore, when I conſider all the Particulars of his unhappy State, *viz.* his Soul diſorder'd with ſinful Paſſions, his Heart accuſtomed to reſiſt the Inſpirations of Grace, his Mind diſturbed with exceſſive Fears, ſuch as the near Approach of Judgment and Eternity muſt needs cauſe in one that has always lived an Enemy to God; and, finally, his Body racked with Variety of Pains, and labouring under a mortal Anguiſh: When, I ſay, I conſider all theſe Things, I cannot but look upon him as one on the Brink of eternal Ruin, unleſs an extraordinary Grace comes in to his Aſſiſtance: And I leave any one to judge,

judge, whether living on in Sin, in Hopes of being favoured with this extraordinary Mercy, be not an extravagant Preſumption, and the very Height of *Tempting God?* Truly, I cannot judge otherwiſe of it; nor can I but fear, that thoſe, who thus pretend to play Tricks with God, and get Heaven by a Cheat, notwithſtanding the fair Shew of Repentance many of them make in their laſt Sickneſs (which ignorant People call *dying well*): I cannot but fear, I ſay, that they generally die as they lived, and receive the juſt Reward of their Preſumption, in finding themſelves diſappointed of the Mercy they have ſo long abuſed.

Fourthly, and laſtly, all thoſe are guilty of *Tempting God*, who either continue wilfully in the immediate Occaſion of Sin, or at any Time expoſe themſelves to it without any Neceſſity: The Reaſon hereof is plain and obvious, becauſe God has poſitively commanded us to *fly from Sin as from the Face of a Serpent*; and to oblige us more ſtrictly to it, has expreſly forewarned us, that *whoever loves Danger ſhall periſh in it.* Now he that puts himſelf wilfully into the Occaſion of Sin, ſhews plainly that he loves Danger, and is fond of being tempted; becauſe Occaſion alone is ſo dangerous a Temptation, even to Perſons virtuouſly inclined, that Saints themſelves

ſelves have ſometimes experienced the fatal Power of it: And 'tis no *Hyperbolè* to ſay, that Occaſion alone has murder'd more Souls than all the Plagues, Wars, and Famines have deſtroy'd Bodies: And therefore whoever expoſes himſelf wilfully to Danger, will ſoon experience the fatal Conſequence of his Preſumption, in finding himſelf plunged into all the Diſorders of an unruly Paſſion; for God has never promiſed his Aſſiſtance to thoſe that neglect the ordinary Means appointed by him for their Security: And ſince he has poſitively commanded us to fly from Sin, and ſhun the Occaſions of it; what can ſuch preſumptuous Souls, as deſpiſe his holy Ordinance, and will needs be trying Tricks, and venturing farther than they ought, what can they, I ſay, expect but to meet their Ruin in the Temptation they have ſought? Nor can they then, with Juſtice, complain of their being tempted above their Strength; ſince, in ſuch Caſes, they are their own Tempters, and the wilful Authors of the Miſchief that befals them.

Thus we ſee how many Ways we may *tempt God:* And it appears plainly, from what has been ſaid, that Pride is the ordinary Root of this Sin; that is, either too great a Conceit of our own Strength, or a preſumptuous Confidence in the Goodneſs

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and Mercies of God. Hence Perſons, that are truly humble, have a great Horror of *Tempting God* in any kind; for the humble Chriſtian being always diſtruſtful of himſelf, and knowing that all his Strength muſt come from above, is afraid to neglect any of the Means ordained by Almighty God for the better ſecuring of his Soul's Salvation: This keeps him faithful to all his Duties, and particularly to the Duty of Prayer, becauſe he knows all heavenly Grace flows through that Channel: This alſo makes him fearful to undertake any Buſineſs of Moment, or engage himſelf in any Courſe of Life, without firſt having Recourſe to the Father of Lights, and employing all Endeavours poſſible to procure his Bleſſing.

This again makes him tremble at the very Thought of forfeiting God's Grace; and if, through human Weakneſs, he finds himſelf fallen under his Diſpleaſure, he loſes no Time, but turns immediately all his Thoughts towards the uſual Remedies preſcribed in that Caſe: So far is he from reſolving to put Things upon the laſt Hazard, or pretending to make a ſinful Life the Way to a happy Death. This finally makes him ſet a continual Guard upon his Senſes, avoid the dangerous Liberties of the World, keep at the greateſt Diſtance poſſible

poſſible from all Occaſions of Sin, and decline whatever may inflame his Paſſions, or give his Enemy an Advantage over him.

Grant us, O God, this humble Diſpoſition; that, being truly ſenſible of our Dependance on thee, we may be ever faithful in performing whatever thou requireſt of us. We know thou never forſakeſt any, but ſuch as firſt abandon thee; and 'tis but juſt that they, who deſpiſe the Order of thy infinite Wiſdom ſhould forfeit their Share in the Protection of thy Almighty Power. However, forgive us our paſt Failings, and withdraw not thy Mercies from us, as our Sins have juſtly deſerved; but compaſſionating our Weakneſs, enable us with thy holy Grace to be more faithful to thee hereafter.

The

The XLVIIth ENTERTAINMENT.

Of the Blind Beggar.

A certain Blindman ſat down by the Way-ſide begging. Luke xviii. 35.

THE Evangeliſt gives us a Relation of the miraculous Cure of a blind Beggar, who ſitting by the Way-ſide, and hearing a great Throng of People paſſing by, aſk'd what it meant; and being told that *Jeſus of Nazareth was paſſing by*, cry'd out to him *Jeſus Son of David have Mercy on me.* But being rebuked by thoſe that went before, and bid to hold his Peace, he was ſo far from being diſcouraged, that *he cry'd out much louder than before, Jeſus Son of David have Mercy on me.* Whereupon our Saviour ſtopp'd, and ordering him to be brought to him, aſk'd him what he deſired of him; He anſwer'd, *Lord that I may ſee:* Which our Saviour, according to his uſual Goodneſs, immediately granted, telling him that the Recovery of his Sight was the Reward of his *Faith:* Whereupon he immediately ſaw, and *follow'd Jeſus, praiſing and glorifying God.*

This

This is the hiſtorical Account of this miraculous Cure: Now as the corporal Blindneſs of this Beggar is a Figure of the ſpiritual Blindneſs of a ſinful Soul deprived of the Sight of Grace, ſo the Method he took to recover his Sight, and his Behaviour after he had received that Bleſſing contain many inſtructive Leſſons for thoſe, who are yet labouring under the Blindneſs of ſome violent Inclination, or Habit of Sin: The deep Senſe he had of his unhappy Condition; the preſſing Deſire he ſhew'd to be deliver'd from it; his Watchfulneſs in laying hold of the favourable Opportunity that offer'd itſelf; the Earneſtneſs and Perſeverance of his Prayer, notwithſtanding the Rebukes he met with; and finally, his hearty Confidence in *Jeſus Chriſt*, are the Leſſons a Sinner muſt practiſe after him in Order to obtain his Cure. And when his heavenly Phyſician has beſtow'd this Bleſſing on him, then he muſt alſo imitate the grateful Behaviour of this Beggar, in following *Jeſus Chriſt*, and *glorifying God* for ſo ſignal a Mercy: But I ſhall now confine myſelf to the firſt Part of the Pattern we have before us; and only mark out from it what a Sinner muſt do in Order to obtain the perfect Cure of his Soul; which ſhall be the whole Subject of this Entertainment.

The

The firſt Thing to be remark'd in the blind Beggar mention'd in the Goſpel, is the deep Senſe he had of his unhappy Condition in the want of Sight; which went ſo far as even to make him forget or wholly overlook his other Neceſſities, tho' otherwiſe very preſſing upon him: For, notwithſtanding his extreme Poverty, which even obliged him to beg his Bread by the Way-ſide; when he was inform'd that *Jeſus of Nazareth* was paſſing by, attended on by a great Throng of People, inſtead of managing ſo favourable an Occaſion for the getting ſome Alms, he utterly forgot his Nakedneſs and Hunger, and made his whole Application to Chriſt for the Recovery of his Sight: Whence it plainly appears, that he regarded his Blindneſs as the greateſt Evil and Preſſure of his Life, and his greateſt Intereſt to be deliver'd from it; becauſe whatever is prefer'd in Practice, is a Man's greateſt Intereſt, and lies neareſt to his Heart.

Here then is mark'd out the firſt Diſpoſition neceſſary to prepare a Sinner for his Cure; and indeed the Ground-work of all the reſt: For whoever is under the Tyranny of any ſinful Paſſion, is utterly incapable of being deliver'd from it, till he be ſo far ſenſible of his Condition, as both to know and own himſelf to be unhappy.

The Reaſon is clear, becauſe all the Diſtempers of the Soul being voluntary, nothing but a ſincere Will, and hearty Deſire to be deliver'd from them, can diſpoſe a Sinner for his Cure: And ſince no Man can have a hearty Deſire to be deliver'd from an Evil, till he regards it as an Evil, and is ſenſible of his being unhappy under it; it follows that unleſs Almighty God be pleaſed to open a Sinner's Eyes, at leaſt ſo far as to let him ſee the Danger and Unhappineſs of his State, there is no Hopes of his Cure; all Remedies are ineffectual; the very beſt Advice and moſt preſſing Remonſtrances are wholly loſt upon him: But when he once begins to be uneaſy, and groan under the Weight of his ſinful Inclinations, Oh! then there is Hopes of him; becauſe this feeling Senſe of his Condition is itſelf a good Step towards his Cure.

He muſt therefore look upon the ſinful State of his Soul, as the greateſt Evil that could have happen'd to him; nay, he muſt regard it as a Sovereign Evil, and his Deliverance from it as the Sovereign and moſt deſirable Good of his Life: For then all worldly Concerns will give Way to the Intereſt of his Soul's Salvation. His chief Buſineſs will be to ſtudy and employ the proper Means to compaſs this great End; and tho' perhaps many other Concerns will call upon *him*, yet nothing will be able to take

take him off from thoſes of his Soul; becauſe he will be convinced, that it is the moſt important Thing he has to do in this World; which therefore ought to have the firſt Place in his Heart, and be follow'd with the greateſt Application.

As therefore the Senſe of his unhappy State is the firſt Diſpoſition towards his Deliverance from it, ſo its firſt Fruit will be to inſpire him with an hearty and eager Deſire of it: For no Man can naturally be ſenſible of a great Evil, but he muſt be deſirous to remove it from him; and when this Deſire is once fix'd in the Heart, all Endeavours towards it will follow of Courſe. This appears plainly in the Conduct of the Children of this World; who as they are uſually eager in their Deſires, ſo are they proportionably eager in their Purſuits. A Perſon, for Example, that has a conſiderable Fortune in View, takes all the Pains and Precautions poſſible to gain his Point: He makes his Court to thoſe, who he thinks may promote his Intereſt, tho' otherwiſe inferiour to him: He watches all Opportunities that favour his Deſign, and is careful to prevent or remove all Obſtacles that may obſtruct it. In a Word, we may obſerve in him an unwearied Application, and every Thing he ſays or does tending directly to the End he has

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in View: And how comes this? Becauſe his Heart is ſet upon it, and the Eagerneſs of his Purſuit is but the natural Fruit of the Eagerneſs of his Deſires.

In like Manner therefore, when a Sinner once takes his Salvation ſeriouſly to Heart; when he has an earneſt Deſire of it, as the blind Beggar had of receiving Sight, there's nothing he will not do to ſucceed in a Concern of that Importance: This Deſire will ſet all the Powers of his Soul at Work, in order to know and obey the Will of God in every Thing that is neceſſary for his Deliverance from the unhappy State into which he is fallen: But above all, he will be watchful not to let ſlip the favourable Opportunity of *Jeſus paſſing by*; but lay faſt Hold of it, and improve it to his beſt Advantage, as the Blind-man did; which contains a Moral of great Inſtruction: For if this poor Man had not been upon the Watch, but let *Jeſus* paſs by without applying himſelf to him, perhaps the ſame Occaſion had never offer'd itſelf again; and ſo he would have continued blind as he was, to his very Death.

This certainly happens in a ſpiritual Manner to many Sinners; who neglecting the precious Moments that are ſometimes offer'd them by the Father of Mercies, have ever after continued in their ſinful State.

For

For which Reaſon the Prophet *Iſaiah* exhorts us *to ſeek the Lord when he may be found, and to call upon him when he is near:* And our Saviour himſelf, weeping over the City of *Jeruſalem*, attributes it's Reprobation to it's Neglect of the Mercy he offer'd it in that very Hour: *For if thou hadſt but known* (ſays Chriſt) *even in this thy Day the Things which are conducing to thy Peace: But they are now hidden from thy Eyes.* And then he pronounced thoſe Words, which contain the Prophecy of it's utter Deſtruction.

A Sinner therefore muſt be watchful to obſerve the happy Moments, when *Jeſus of Nazareth is paſſing by.* And what are thoſe but when he finds himſelf feelingly touch'd with ſome holy Inſpiration, which is but a *paſſing Grace:* For it comes and goes like a ſudden Ray of Light darted upon the Soul: And therefore if he has not his Heart ready open to receive it, and make his beſt Advantage of it; if he lets *Jeſus paſs by*, without managing ſo favourable an Occaſion for the Benefit of his Soul's Salvation, who knows when he will return again that Way? The moſt proper Time then to make his Application to his Saviour and Redeemer is when he finds him approaching near him, and, as it were, calling upon him by the interiour Motions

Motions of his holy Grace: It is then he muſt pour forth his Soul before him with the moſt ardent Sighs of a Heart pierced with Grief for his paſt Offences: It is then he muſt ſend up to Heaven ſuch fervent Prayers, as are a kind of Violence to the Bowels of infinite Mercy: It is then infine he muſt cry out with all his Force, *Jeſus, Son of David, have Mercy on me.*

This was the Blind-Man's Prayer, when he was inform'd that *Jeſus of Nazareth* was paſſing by. But what happen'd to him upon it? *They who went before rebuked him, to make him hold his Peace.* But he, inſtead of being diſcouraged at it, cry'd out much louder than before, *Jeſus, Son of David, have Mercy on me.* And ſo muſt a Sinner do who ſeriouſly reſolves to ſave his Soul. If the World, like thoſe who rebuked the poor Blind-Man for crying ſo loud, and would needs have impoſed ſilence on him; if the World, I ſay, offended with his Zeal and Fervour, clamours againſt him, and with its Cenſures, Railleries, and Perſecutions endeavours to diſhearten him from proſecuting his pious Deſign, he muſt not be at all ſurpriſed to meet with Trials of this Nature; ſince the Holy Ghoſt has forewarn'd us by the Pen of St. *Paul*, that *Whoever will live godly in Chriſt, ſhall ſuffer Perſecution:* For the World

will ever hate thoſe that abandon it to come over to Chriſt: It will load them with the heavieſt Cenſures, and give a malicious Turn to every thing they do. Their Devotion ſhall paſs for Hypocriſy; their Sobriety for Affectation, their Retirement from Company for the Effect of Moroſeneſs, or a Vanity to appear Singular. In a Word, nothing will eſcape its Malice; and the moſt Chriſtian Practices will only afford Matter for Merriment and Laughter: So that whoever will effectually compaſs his deſired Cure, muſt raiſe his Heart above whatever the World will ſay of him: For if he be concern'd at it, the Uneaſineſs it will give him will ſo imbitter the moſt neceſſary Remedies, as will render them utterly impracticable to him.

But let us now ſuppoſe the World ſhould prove better natured than uſually, and give him no Moleſtation, yet he muſt expect a terrible and laſting War with himſelf. His old Boſom-Friends, I mean, his old Habits and Paſſions, will riſe furiouſly againſt him, and with repeated Aſſaults and violent Solicitations, endeavour to oblige him to yield up his Cauſe, and deſiſt from any longer importuning Heaven for his Cure. But what muſt he do in this ſo difficult a Conflict; when his Enemies preſs hard upon him on the one hand, and Almighty God, his

his only Refuge, ſeems perhaps to take no Notice of him on the other? Muſt he lay down his Arms of Prayer and Mortification? Muſt he forbear crying out to *Jeſus* for Mercy? Oh! no, by no Means: He muſt do as the Beggar did, who being *rebuked* by the Multitude for crying ſo loud, and bid to hold his Peace, raiſed his Voice much higher, and cried out louder than before, *Jeſus, Son of David, have Mercy on me:* So muſt a Sinner do, who reſolves to make himſelf heard: He muſt redouble his Cries and Prayers, as his Enemies redouble their Aſſaults upon him: He muſt raiſe his Voice much higher, and cry out louder than before for Mercy: If his Paſſions continue obſtinate in ſoliciting him to Sin, he muſt be as obſtinate in ſoliciting *Jeſus* to have Mercy on him; if they be unwearied in ſeeking his Ruin, he muſt be as unwearied in imploring the Divine Aſſiſtance to deſtroy them.

The Devil will indeed do all he can to ſilence him, and make him believe his Caſe is deſperate, and that it is in vain to cry out any longer for Mercy: But let him take it for a certain Truth, that the Life, Health, and Salvation of his Soul depends upon his unwearied Perſeverance in Prayer; I mean, not a drowſy, negligent, and ſlothful Prayer, in which the

Heart has little or no Share, but ſuch a Prayer as the Blind-Beggar has ſet us a Copy of; a Prayer, proceeding from a preſſing Deſire of the Heart, and in which the Soul ſpeaks much louder than the Tongue; for whoever is perſeverant in daily ſending up ſuch Prayers to Heaven, ought to have a hearty Confidence to ſee them in due Time bleſſed with Succeſs: And if Almighty God ſeems for ſome Time to have no Regard to them, as Chriſt ſeemed at firſt to take no Notice of the Beggar, it is only to oblige him, by this ſeeming Refuſal, to redouble his Fervour, and cry out louder than before; becauſe this Importunity in aſking is as acceptable to God, as it is uſually diſpleaſing to Men: Heaven is to be gained by Violence, and it is the Violence of an unwearied Perſeverance in Prayer muſt do the Work.

But then Care muſt be taken, that it be attended with that other Diſpoſition, which, as our Saviour himſelf has intimated, gave the finiſhing Stroke to the Efficacy of the Blind-Beggar's Prayer; I mean, a hearty Confidence in the Goodneſs and Power of *Jeſus Chriſt:* For our Saviour having ordered him to be brought before him, and aſked him what he deſired, he anſwered, *Lord, that I may receive Sight:* He neither

ther doubted of his Power nor Good-will; but being fully aſſured of both, he confidently preſented his Petition to him, which our Saviour immediately granted; ſaying, *Receive Sight, thy Faith has made thee whole.* The true Secret, therefore, to obtain the Cure of all our ſpiritual Diſtempers, is to aſk it with a hearty Confidence in the Grace and Mercies of our Redeemer; as, on the contrary, one Reaſon why our Prayers prove often ineffectual, is, becauſe they are not attended with this holy Diſpoſition; for inſtead of placing all our Truſt in God, and making our Addreſſes to him with an unſhaken Faith, and entire Dependance on him, we either have a ſecret Confidence in our own Strength and Induſtry, or a Diffidence of his Goodneſs, or the Power of his Grace.

It is true, if a Sinner conſiders nothing but himſelf, the Number and Enormity of his Sins paſt, and the preſent Difficulties he has to ſtruggle with, afford Matter for ſuch melancholy Reflections, as ſuffice to make him deſpond: But when he turns his Eyes towards *Jeſus Chriſt*, his Saviour and Redeemer, and conſiders him as an inexhauſtible Source of Mercy, and veſted with a Power equal to his Goodneſs, does he not then diſcover ſuch ſolid Grounds of Hope, as will not only remove all Diffi-

dence and Miſtruſt, but even encourage him to preſent his Petitions with the moſt aſſured Confidence of Succeſs? For may he not then juſtly reaſon thus with himſelf? It is true my Sins are very great, but the Mercies of my Redeemer are yet infinitely greater: My Wounds are dangerous, but nothing is incurable to the Hand of an Omnipotent Phyſician: Did he not come into the World to ſave Sinners? My being then a Sinner ought not to diſcourage me from hoping for a Share in the Bleſſings he came to beſtow: Take Courage then, my Soul; what Reaſon haſt thou to deſpair, unleſs it be of thy own Strength? For thou can'ſt do nothing of thyſelf; but deſpair not of his Power or Mercy, who is infinite in both. With theſe Conſiderations, I ſay, a Sinner muſt encourage himſelf to approach with Confidence to the Throne of Grace; and there continue to cry out for Mercy, until the Divine Goodneſs, moved with his earneſt Prayer, ſpeaks to his Soul what Chriſt ſaid to the blind Man, *Thy Faith hath made thee ound.*

But when this happy Hour is come, and that, by God's Bleſſing, he now finds a Hatred to Sin deeply fixed in his Heart, his Paſſions ſubdued ſo far as to be Maſter of them, and himſelf walking ſteadily in

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the Obſervance of God's Holy Law, which are the true Symptoms of a ſincere Converſion, he muſt then follow his Guide a few Steps farther, and alſo imitate the grateful Behaviour of the Beggar after the Recovery of his Sight: Which ſhall be the Subject of the following Entertainment.

The XLVIIIth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Beggar's Gratitude to Chriſt for his Cure.

And immediately he received Sight, and followed him, and glorified God. Luke xviii. 43.

IN my laſt Diſcourſe, I drew ſome moral Inſtructions from the blind Beggar's Behaviour, whereby he moved Chriſt to have Compaſſion on him; and from the Method he took to obtain that Bleſſing, I marked out the moſt conſiderable Steps by which a Sinner muſt approach the Throne of Mercy, in order to obtain the Grace of a perfect Converſion, and the Cure of his Soul: But the Gratitude of this poor Beggar, ſet forth by the Evangeliſt, in the

Praiſes he paid to God for the Bleſſing he received, and immediately *following Chriſt*, is ſo inſtructive a Leſſon for all Sinners now delivered by God's Grace from their former ſpiritual Blindneſs, that I intend to make it the whole Subject of this Diſcourſe

The Goſpel then tells us, that as ſoon as the Blind-Man had received Sight, he immediately *follow'd Chriſt, praiſing and glorifying God:* He was ſo tranſported with the deep Senſe of the Favour he had received, that he could neither think nor ſpeak of any Thing elſe: He expreſſed his Gratitude by Words, in *praiſing and glorifying God*; and he ſhewed it in his Actions, by immediately *following Chriſt*; and we cannot doubt, but he proclaimed every where the Praiſes of his Benefactor, and retained as long as he lived a grateful Remembrance of the Bleſſing he had beſtowed upon him.

It is certain, that to praiſe and glorify God for Benefits received, is ſo eſſential and indiſpenſable a Duty, that God demands it of us, as a Tribute due to him for all Bleſſings whatſoever, whether ſpiritual or temporal: This appears plainly in St. *Luke*'s Relation of the *Ten Lepers* cured by Chriſt, and ſent to ſhew themſelves to the Prieſt, as it was commanded by the Law

Law of *Moſes:* However, tho' they were all cured, but One of the Ten returned back to glorify God, and pay his Acknowledgments to the viſible Author of his Cure: But hear how ſeverely Chriſt cenſured the Ingratitude of the other Nine in the following Words: *Were there not Ten cleanſed? But where are the Nine? There were not found that returned to give Glory to God, but only this one Stranger.* Whence it is manifeſt, that thoſe *Nine Lepers* were wanting to a Duty which God required of them, and that our Saviour was highly offended at it.

Ingratitude is certainly a Vice moſt odious both to God and Man: For no Man beſtows a Favour, but expects at leaſt the Return of a grateful Heart, when no other can be made: And this Debt is always exacted the moſt rigorouſly, becauſe every Man has it in his Power to pay it; nay, the moſt generous and diſintereſted Souls are moſt apt to reſent a Neglect of it; becauſe, it being the only Reward they look for from Men, if they be robbed of it, they loſe the whole Fruit of their Generoſity in this World. Now if this be ſo betwixt Man and Man, how much more juſtly muſt Almighty God, whoſe Bounty to his Creatures is infinite, be offended at the Sin of Ingratitude; ſince it robs him

not only of the Glory due to him, and of which he is moſt jealous, but of the Hearts of his Creatures, which he claims as his peculiar Right? It is for this Reaſon that Ingratitude is repreſented by ſpiritual Writers as a Sin, that particularly provokes God to draw back his liberal Hand, and obſtructs the Over-flowings of his Bounties upon his Creatures: Whereas a Heart mindful of Favours received, and truly grateful for them, draws down a continual Profuſion of freſh Bleſſings on the Soul; and every Act of Praiſe and Thankſgiving offered to God, is not only accepted by him in Part of Payment of the Debt we owe him, but as a Merit that moves him to repeat and continue his former Liberality towards us.

But to give you a remarkable Inſtance, how acceptable this Tribute of a grateful Heart is to Almighty God, and how exact he is in demanding it for all Bleſſings, both ſpiritual and temporal: We read, in the Old Teſtament, that he expreſly commanded *Moſes* to inſtitute ſeveral ſolemn Feaſts to be kept yearly, in Memory of the moſt ſignal Favours he had beſtowed upon his People; as their Delivery from the *Egyptian Bondage*; their miraculous Paſſage through the *Red-Sea*; his giving them the Law upon *Mount Sinai*; and feeding them with

with *Manna* in the Deſart; ſome of which miraculous Food was alſo kept in the Ark, to be a laſting Memorial of that Favour. Now all the Ceremonies to be performed on thoſe ſolemn Days were exactly ſet down in the Law of *Moſes*, according to the Directions he had received from God himſelf on the Mount; and the principal Driſt of them was to renew yearly in the People's Minds the Remembrance of the Favours they had received upon thoſe Days, and excite them to a grateful Senſe and Acknowledgment of them: Sacrifices of Thankſgiving were offered, and Canticles were ſung to praiſe and glorify God, the Author of thoſe Bleſſings: And leſt the Meaning of thoſe Ceremonies ſhould ever be forgot, *Moſes* expreſly commands all Parents to explain them to their Children; that ſo not only the Ceremonies themſelves, but alſo the Meaning of them, might be tranſmitted down, from Father to Son, throughout all ſucceeding Ages. *When thy Son* (ſays he) *ſhall aſk thee in Time to come, ſaying, What mean theſe Laws, theſe Ceremonies and Rites, which the Lord our God has commanded us? Thou ſhalt ſay unto him, We were* Pharaoh's *Slaves in* Egypt, *and the Lord brought us out of* Egypt *with a mighty Hand* —— *and therefore the Lord*

has

has commanded us to obſerve theſe Laws and Ceremonies. Deut. vi. 20.

Thus you ſee the Care God took to perpetuate the Memory of his Benefits, by commanding it to be handed down from Generation to Generation: And for what other End, than to perpetuate thereby the Gratitude of his People; and make them ſenſible, that, beſides a laſting grateful Heart, he expected from them over and and above an annual Tribute of ſolemn Praiſe and Thankſgiving for paſt Favours? Nay, has not the Church the ſame End in View in all the Solemn Feaſts of the New Law, as thoſe of *Chriſtmas*, *Eaſter*, *Pentecoſt*, and the Feaſt of *Corpus Chriſti?* Are they not all ordained to refreſh in our Minds the Remembrance of ſome ſignal Bleſſing beſtow'd by God upon his Church, and thereby to warm our Hearts into a Senſe of Gratitude to the Author of thoſe Bleſſings? And what are the Feaſts of *Martyrs* and *Confeſſors*, but Days of publick Thankſgiving to God for their Victories and Triumphs, obtained through the Power of his holy Grace? So that the moſt ſolemn Inſtitutions, both of the Old Teſtament and Church of Chriſt, agree in this, that they all tend to inſpire us with a grateful Senſe of God's Benefits, and convince us that Gratitude, Praiſe, and Thankſgiving,

giving, are Duties which God requires of us.

Now then, to return to the particular Caſe of a Sinner delivered from the Bondage of Sin by the Power and Efficacy of God's Holy Grace; ſuch a one muſt look upon himſelf ſo highly indebted to the Divine Goodneſs for this ſignal Mercy, that he ought to retain a grateful Remembrance of it as long as he lives: For whether he conſiders the Value of the Benefit itſelf, without which he would have been loſt for ever; or his own Unworthineſs of it, in having ſo often provoked Almighty God to withdraw his Mercies from him; or the unwearied Patience of his Deliverer, in having forborn ſo long with him; or, finally, the Multitudes of thoſe who are never favoured with it, but are juſtly permitted to live and die in their Sins; every one of theſe Circumſtances lays an Obligation of Gratitude upon him, and renders a Forgetfulneſs of it Criminal in the Sight of God.

Nor is this the only Motive he has to induce him to it; but his Perſeverance in the Grace to which he is reſtored depends in a great Meaſure upon it: For as the Grace of his Converſion was a gratuitous Gift of God, ſo his Perſeverance in it muſt be owing to a Continuation of the ſame

merciful

merciful Bounty towards him; ſince it is an undoubted Truth, that if the Hand which healed him be not always ready to ſupport him, he will moſt certainly fall back into his former unhappy State: So that it is his Intereſt, as well as Duty, to do his utmoſt to prevail with God not to withdraw from him the merciful Hand, to which he owes his Cure: And ſince there is nothing more effectual to draw down this Bleſſing on him, than a laſting grateful Senſe of the Favour already received; his Care muſt be to fix it deeply in his Heart, to make it the daily Subject of his Thankſgiving, and never leave off praiſing and glorifying God with all the Powers of his Soul. It is true, there are many penitential Duties, from which a Penitent may be juſtly exempted, as being inconſiſtent with his Circumſtances: For if he be poor, he cannot give Alms; if ſickly, he cannot faſt, nor practiſe many other Mortifications, which perhaps would otherwiſe be proper; nor can he ſpend ſo much Time in Prayer as would be required, if the neceſſary Duties of a lawful Calling will not allow of it: All theſe then will ſometimes admit of a Diſpenſation; but the Duty of Gratitude admits of none; no Pretence can exempt him from it; neither Poverty, nor Sickneſs, nor Employ-

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ments, are any Hindrance to it, but rather furniſh him with ſo many different Occaſions of practiſing this Advice of St. *Paul* to the *Theſſalonians*, Chap. v. 18. *Give Thanks in all Things; for this is the Will of God in Jeſus Chriſt.* So that when Gratitude is throughly fixed in the Heart of a Penitent, 'tis as a perpetual Sacrifice; 'tis a Fire that never ceaſes to burn, what Way ſoever the Head or Hands are employ'd; becauſe the Heart is equally free under all Circumſtances or Engagements of the Body.

Oh! how truly ſenſible was the Royal Penitent of this important Duty, when he cried out, *Lord, thou haſt broken my Chains; to thee I will offer up a Sacrifice of Praiſe!* How was his Heart inflamed, when he made this ſolemn Declaration: *I will never ceaſe to ſing the Mercies of the Lord?* With what feeling Senſe of Gratitude did he breathe forth theſe pious Words: *Bleſs the Lord, O my Soul; and all that is within me bleſs his Holy Name: Bleſs the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his Favours; who forgives all thy Iniquities; who heals all thy Weakneſſes; who redeems thy Life from Deſtruction; who crowns thee with loving Kindneſs and tender Mercy!* Pſal. cii. Thus ſpoke the Royal Penitent; and 'tis plain his very Soul ſpoke in thoſe Words; 'tis

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plain thoſe inflamed Rapſodies iſſued forth from the violent Fire of Love and Gratitude burning in his Soul, and were but the Effuſions and Over-flowings of a Heart filled with the great Ideas of the Mercies he had received, and unable to contain itſelf: And, truly, we never read of any celebrated Penitent or Convert, but his Gratitude to God for the Mercy of his Cure had a remarkable Part in the Hiſtory of his Life.

I will only mention one Example, *viz.* that of St. *Mary Magdalene*; whoſe Gratitude to Chriſt appears in every Action and Circumſtance of her Life, after her Converſion: For, from that Moment ſhe conceived ſo great a Love for him, that her whole Delight and Satisfaction was to be near his Sacred Perſon: She ſeemed to make it her Glory to ſet off the Triumph of her Conqueror, by ſeeking all publick Occaſions to pay her Attendance on him: That Action of her pouring a precious Ointment upon him, is commended by Chriſt himſelf, and by Divine Inſpiration recorded in Holy Writ, to ſerve as an everlaſting Monument of her Gratitude to him: She followed him in his greateſt Diſtreſs, even when he was forſaken by his Diſciples: She expoſed herſelf to the Inſults of the brutal Soldiers, in meeting him with weeping

ing Eyes when he was carrying his Croſs, and ſtanding by him whilſt he hung upon it: She was up early in the Morning to ſeek her dear Lord, and came with Spices and Perfumes to embalm his Body, without Fear of the Guards that were ſet to watch it; and not finding it in the Sepulchre, ſhe paid him what ſhe could, the Tribute of her Tears: But when ſhe could no longer enjoy the viſible Preſence of the Perſon who poſſeſſed her whole Heart, ſhe retired into a Deſart, ſequeſter'd from all human Society, leſt any Thing of this World ſhould divert her Thoughts from the only Object that could give her any Comfort or Satisfaction.

Here we have, in the Behaviour of a holy Penitent, a perfect Pattern of Gratitude, the chief Subject whereof was the firſt Grace of her Converſion; for which ſhe thought herſelf bound to conſecrate the whole Remainder of her Life to the ſervice of her merciful Benefactor. This leads me to the laſt Inſtruction mark'd out in the Behaviour of the poor Blind-Beggar after his Cure: For as ſoon as he had received Sight, he immediately *follow'd Chriſt*, and by that profeſs'd himſelf to be one of his Diſciples. And ſo will a Sinner truly converted do: He will follow Chriſt in the Imitation of his Virtues, and Practice of

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all Chriſtian Duties that are ſuitable to his State. If he be poor, he will imitate the Humility and Patience of Chriſt, in ſubmitting chearfully to the Hardſhips incident to that Condition: If he has a Family to provide for by his Induſtry and Labour, he will do it in the Spirit of Penance, and take for his Pattern the painful and laborious Life of Chriſt: If he be bleſs'd with Plenty, he will imitate his Goodneſs, Charity and Mercy in relieving the diſtreſs'd, and encourage himſelf to it by remembring theſe Maxims of the Goſpel, that *what is done to the Poor is done to Chriſt himſelf*; *that the merciful ſhall obtain Mercy*; that *in what Meaſure we ſhall meaſure out to others, in the ſame it ſhall be meaſured out to us:* Finally; that Alms given to the Poor, is but Money depoſited in their Hands, to purchaſe for him a Treaſure in the Kingdom of Heaven.

He will alſo remember, that his Condition is much like to that of a Perſon newly recover'd of ſome very great Sickneſs; who is therefore obliged to continue a regular Diet and Exerciſe, for Fear of a Relapſe. And this will determine him to a uniform Practice of Devotion, and a Chriſtian Manner of employing his Time: It will convince him of the Neceſſity of daily Prayer; of having frequently Recourſe to the Foun-

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tains of Grace, and nouriſhing his Devotion with reading of good Books: For whoever propoſes to himſelf the exact Obſervance of God's Holy Law, and takes it ſeriouſly to Heart as a Condition neceſſary to Salavtion, will, of courſe, be ſolicitous to inform himſelf of the Means in order to it: And therefore when he finds, upon Enquiry, that Prayer and the Sacraments are the moſt powerful Means to attain to this great End, as being ordain'd by Chriſt himſelf; he will infallibly conclude, that he cannot pretend to be in earneſt, if he either lays aſide thoſe Means, or is notoriouſly negligent in the Uſe of them.

Laſtly, he will be convinced that he has an Obligation, over and above what many others have, to be always a faithful Servant and Follower of Chriſt, by Reaſon of his paſt Sins: For he has been a Rebel againſt him, and by his bad Example has perhaps drawn others into the ſame Guilt. What other Compenſation then can he make him for having graciouſly received him into Favour after the many Treaſons committed againſt him, than to do what he can to repair the Scandals of his Life paſt, and promote the Intereſt of ſo merciful a Sovereign, by appearing now as reſolute and zealous in his Service, as he was before an Enemy to it: He ought there-

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fore never to loſe the Remembrance of his paſt Sins; but keep them always in View, as the Royal Prophet did; to ſerve him as a Spur to excite him to a more than ordinary Zeal and Fervour, in every Thing relating to God's ſervice; the Effect whereof will be, to edify his Neighbour as much now by his ſober, regular, and Chriſtian Behavour, as he diſ-edified him before by his Irregularities and Diſorders. Thus will he become a true and faithful Follower of Chriſt, a Diſciple worthy of ſo good a Maſter, an Imitator of him in this Life, and a Partaker of his eternal Crown hereafter.

The XLIXth ENTERTAINMENT.

It is our Duty to Love our Enemies.

Love your Enemies; do good to them that hate you. Matt. v. 44.

THESE Words being preciſe and clear, admit of no Interpretation in Favour of corrupt Nature; which, if it pretends to plead for itſelf, by alledging the Impoſſibility of loving an Enemy, St. *Jerome* has already anſwer'd it, in his Comment upon this very Text, ſaying, *that the Things*

Things commanded by Chriſt, are perfect indeed, but not impoſſible: Which, in Reference to the Duty in Queſtion, he proves from the Practice *firſt*, of *David* returning Good for Evil to *Saul*, who thirſted after his Blood; *2ly*, of St. *Stephen* praying for thoſe that ſtoned him; *3dly*, of St. *Paul* wiſhing to be anathematized for the Sake of his Perſecutors; and laſtly, from the Example of Chriſt himſelf, whoſe Practice as well as Doctrine, as to what regards the Duty of forgiving and loving our Enemies, ſhall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

There is no Duty in the whole Goſpel either inculcated with more frequent Repetitions, or recommended by more illuſtrious Examples from the Life and Actions of our Saviour *Jeſus Chriſt*, than that of Love and Charity to our Enemies. To make this evident, let us firſt examine what he has taught relating to this Subject: For whether we look into the firſt or laſt Sermon preach'd by him, the one upon the Mount, the other at his laſt Supper, we ſhall find this Doctrine ſo amply treated, both in the one and the other, that there is no Room to doubt but our Saviour's Intention, in thus beginning and ending his Preaching with it, was to give his Diſciples both an early Tincture, and laſting Impreſſion of it. And truly, conſidering what

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utter Strangers the *Jews* were to the Doctrine of pardoning Injuries, and loving their Enemies, it needed all the Recommendation poſſible, to bring it into Credit.

For the clearer Underſtanding whereof you muſt know, that as in many other Particulars, ſo in Reference to brotherly Love and Charity, the Jewiſh Doctors had very much corrupted the Moſaick Law, by impoſing their own Interpretations and Traditions for Law, upon the People. As for Inſtance; the fifth Commandement forbids *Murder* as a heinous Crime, and it was puniſh'd with Death: But, becauſe the uſual Steps to it as *Anger*, *Hatred*, *Enmities*, and the like, were not forbid in expreſs Terms; they concluded, that provided they but kept their Hands free from Blood, the foremention'd Paſſions might be entertain'd in their Hearts, and expreſs'd in Words, without any Breach of the Commandement.

Now to condemn this Abuſe and Miſinterpretation of God's Law, our Saviour in his Sermon on the Mount delivers the following Maxims thus. *Ye have heard that it hath been ſaid by them of Old, Thou ſhall not kill; but I ſay unto you, that whoever is angry with his Brother without a Cauſe, ſhall be in Danger of the Judgment; and whoever ſhall ſay to his Brother* Racha,

Racha, *ſhall be in Danger of the Counſel; but whoever ſhall ſay, thou Fool, ſhall be in Danger of Hell-fire.* Matt. v. 21, 22. And to expreſs the Hatred Almighty God has of Enmities and Quarrels, he proceeds in this Manner. *Therefore if thou bringeſt thy Gift to the Altar, and there remembreſt that thy Brother has any Thing againſt thee; leave thy Gift before the Altar, go thy Way, and be firſt reconciled to thy Brother.* Matt. v. 24. Here you ſee Chriſt prefers the Duty of Charity before Sacrifice; which tho' it be the higheſt Worſhip we can pay to God, yet we are poſitively commanded to forbear it, till the Duty of Charity to our Neighbour be firſt fully ſatisfied.

The ſecond Corruption of the *Moſaick* Law relating to this Subject, and corrected by Chriſt, was this. The Law was very ſevere in all Caſes of Violence committed upon any one's Perſon, and demanded *Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth.* Now this Law of Retaliation was doubtleſs only intended as a Rule to publick Miniſters of Juſtice to act by: But the *Jewiſh* Doctors, by their corrupt Interpretation, had very much enlarged the Meaning of it, and made it a Rule not only for publick Juſtice, but private Revenge in many Caſes. Wherefore, to remedy this Abuſe, our Saviour gave the following Inſtructions: *You have heard that it*

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hath been ſaid, an Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth: But I ſay unto you, that ye reſiſt not Evil. But whoever ſhall ſmite thee on the right Cheek, turn to him the other alſo; and if any Man will ſue thee at Law, and take away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak alſo; and whoever ſhall compel thee to go a Mile, go with him two. Matt. v. 38, 39, 40. Theſe are the Words of Chriſt; which are ſo far from allowing us to retaliate Injuries, that they expreſly direct us to encounter the Malice of our Enemies, only with the Arms of Patience; and to purchaſe Peace and Charity with our Neighbour, even with the Prejudice of our temporal Intereſt or Conveniencies.

Laſtly, the *Jews* had a current Tradition amongſt them, that they might lawfully hate their Enemies. Becauſe God having commanded them, in the 19th Chapter of *Leviticus*, to love their Friends and Brethren, without laying any expreſs Command upon them relating to their Enemies; the *Jewiſh* Doctors interpreting this Law according to the Inclinations of corrupt Nature, concluded poſitively from it, that they might lawfully bear a Hatred to their Enemies, and do them any Miſchief; provided they kept within the Law. And therefore Chriſt, to aboliſh this Error, ſet the following Rules, in Contradiction to *the* corrupt Tradition of the *Jews*. *Ye*

have

have heard that it has been ſaid; Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thy Enemy: But I ſay unto you; Love your Enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you; that ye may be the Children of your Father, which is in Heaven: For he maketh his Sun to riſe upon the Evil, and on the Good; and ſendeth Rain on the Juſt and on the Unjuſt: For if you love them that love you, what Reward have you? Do not even the Publicans the ſame? And if ye ſalute your Brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the Publicans ſo? Be therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matt. v. 43, 44, *&c.*

Here our Saviour marks out clearly, both the *Perſons* in Relation to whom, and the *Manner* how the Duty of Charity is to be practiſed. As to the Perſons, to whom we owe this Duty, they are particularly ſpecified by Chriſt; *viz.* They that *hate*, *curſe*, *ſlander* and *perſecute* us. In a Word, all thoſe that are our profeſs'd Enemies: And as to the Manner how we muſt behave ourſelves towards them; our Saviour tells us, that we muſt *love* them, *do good* to them, *ſalute* them, that is, pay them all the cuſtomary Duties of Civility; and finally, *pray* for them: And upon theſe Terms

promiſes to own us for the Children of that Father, *who makes his Sun riſe upon the Evil and the Good, and ſends Rain on the Juſt and Unjuſt.*

Now, who would not think but that Chriſt had here ſufficiently declared himſelf upon this Subject, both to ſhew the Importance of it, and imprint a laſting Remembrance of it in all Men's Hearts? However, he reſumes it again in the very next Chapter, which is but a Continuation of the ſame Sermon: For having in that Chapter taught that Form of Prayer, which is commonly call'd our Lord's Prayer, he takes Occaſion to enlarge upon the 5th Petition of it, and tells his Diſciples, *that if they forgive Men their Treſpaſſes, their heavenly Father will alſo forgive them: But if they forgive not Men their Treſpaſſes, neither will their heavenly Father forgive them.* Matt. vi. 15. And 'tis remarkable, that this is the only Petition our Saviour thought fit to enlarge upon, and draw inſtructive Conſequences from; tho' he had already explain'd himſelf ſo fully on this Subject, and the natural Order of Connection led him rather to ſome Reflections upon the concluding Petition, than that which was interrupted by it, and ſeparated from the following Diſcourſe.

Thus

Thus then you ſee our Saviour's early Care to inſtruct us in the Duty of Charity, by his repeating it ſo often in the very firſt Sermon he ever preach'd. However, ſince there is a certain Time, in which Men generally utter thoſe Things that are neareſt to their Hearts, and of which they deſire to leave the deepeſt Impreſſions, (the Time I ſpeak of is, when they are upon the Point of leaving this World;) for then their Words carry a particular Weight, and their Commands challenge the moſt religious Obſervance,) this Time our Saviour choſe, to reſume the Subject he had already enlarged ſo often upon; intending doubtleſs thereby to give us to underſtand, that the Commands he then laid upon us ought to be regarded as the laſt Will and Teſtament of our dying Lord and Maſter.

For 'twas at his laſt Supper, and in his laſt Sermon, perhaps an Hour or two before the firſt Scene of his Paſſion; I mean his Agony in the Garden, when every Word he ſpoke was like a fiery Dart ſhot from an inflamed Heart, and his ſacred Soul was burning with Love and Charity for his Enemies; 'twas then, I ſay, he was pleaſed to deliver to us the Precept of Charity; which, to render it more ſolemn, he uſher'd in with this preparatory Diſcourſe: *My little Children, I have yet a ſmall Time to be*

with you: Ye ſhall ſeek me, and whither I go, ye cannot come, John xiii. 33. Having render'd his Apoſtles attentive with this ſurpriſing Preamble, he proceeds thus; *A new Commandment I give you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.* John xiii. 34. He calls it a new Commandment; as being in a particular Manner the Precept of the *new Law*, and the *Manner* of his having loved, being alſo wholly *new*.

But who does not plainly ſee, that the Motive of our Saviour's making Choice of that Time for the delivering of it, was to recommend and endear it to us? The very Words of his Preamble, give ſufficient Grounds for this Reflection. *My little Children, I have yet a ſmall Time to be with you.* As if he had ſaid, I am now upon the Point of parting from you; wherefore if I may juſtly challenge any Return of Gratitude for all the Favours you have already received, or hope for ſtill from me, I conjure you to lay up in your Hearts this laſt Will and Command of your dying Father, *viz. That ye love one another, as I have loved you.* However, he repeats it ſoon after in Terms ſtill more preſſing, thus; *This is my Commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you.* John xv. 12. Here he calls it *his own Commandment*, by Way of Excellency above all his other Precepts; and

ſo

ſo St. *John* the Evangeliſt, his faithful Interpreter, was always wont to call it; *The Precept of the Lord:* Yet our Saviour thought fit to repeat it, even a third Time, in theſe Terms: *Theſe Things I command you, that ye love one another.* John xv. 17.

Was there ever a Precept deliver'd in ſo preſſing a Manner; or in Circumſtances that could give a greater Weight and Authority to it? However, leſt any Thing ſhould be wanting to induce us to a faithful Practice of it, our Saviour took care to propoſe the moſt endearing Motives to oblige us to it: For he had no ſooner declared, that *it was his Command, that we ſhould love one another, as he had loved us,* but he forthwith added; *By this Token all Men ſhall know that ye are my Diſciples, if ye love one another.* John xiii. 35. And having again repeated the ſame Command, he again repeats the ſame engaging Motive, in a more tender Expreſſion, thus; *Ye ſhall be my Friends, if ye do what I command you.* John xv. 14.

Can any one after this have ſo little Regard to the Duty he owes his heavenly Maſter, as to harbour an ill Will to his Neighbour? Or can the Heart of any Chriſtian be ſo harden'd with Malice, as not to be ſoften'd into a Compliance by ſuch endearing Motives, nor prevail'd upon to de-

poſe all Manner of Rancour or Malice, even to the worſt of Enemies? For we muſt not think, that Chriſt, in commanding us to love one another, meant only to oblige us to love our Friends: The very Words of the Precept exclude any ſuch Interpretation. *I command you* (ſays Chriſt) *that you love one another as I loved you.* Now he loved us when we were his Enemies; and loved us ſo as to ſhed his Blood for us. We cannot therefore love as he did, unleſs we love all without Exception; and the Meaning of the Precept manifeſtly imports, that as he loved us in ſpite of all our Sins and Imperfections; as he loved us, notwithſtanding the Ingratitude, with which he knew we ſhould repay his infinite Goodneſs; finally, as he loved us when we were effectually his Enemies; ſo we muſt love one another, without Diſtinction of Friend or Foe, Benefactor or Perſecutor. In a Word, Love is a Debt we owe to all Mankind, and which no Provocation of Ingratitude, Injuries, or Affronts can ever cancel. This is manifeſtly the Doctrine of Chriſt, which he took care to eſtabliſh from the very Beginning of his Preaching, and bequeath'd to us in his laſt Will and Teſtament.

But tho' his Tongue had been ſilent, his Actions ſpeak loud enough to inform us of our

our Duty: For let us but conſider him in every Part of his Life, and trace his Actions and Sufferings, from the Stable of *Bethlehem* to *Mount Calvary*; and we ſhall find them all but one continued Practice of Love and Charity to his Enemies: Did he not come down from Heaven, and take upon him our mortal Fleſh for Love of his Enemies? Were not all his voluntary Sufferings, the Poverty, Humiliations, and Hardſhips he endured at *Bethlehem*, in *Egypt*, and at *Nazareth*; were they not, I ſay, all undertaken for Love of his Enemies?

But when he now began to manifeſt himſelf to the World by his Doctrine and Miracles, what Contradictions, Revilings, Perſecutions, and Affronts, did he not immediately meet with from his Enemies amongſt the *Jews?* Being continually traduced by them for an *Impoſtor*, *Magician*, *Drunkard*, *Sabbath-breaker*, *Diſturber of the publick Peace*, and what not? And how did Chriſt behave himſelf in theſe Occaſions? How did he revenge himſelf of his Enemies? St. *Peter* tells us, in theſe few Words, *When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he ſuffered, he threaten'd not.* Oh! no; it was not our Saviour's Method to recriminate upon his Adverſaries, or pay them in their own Coin, by returning Injuries for Injuries, ill Lan-

guage for ill Language, Reproaches for Reproaches: He had no other Way of Revenge, than by doing Good for Evil, and heaping Favours on thoſe that perſecuted and reviled him: So that all the ill Uſage he received from the *Jews*, could not hinder him from ſpending three whole Years amongſt them in continual Endeavours to procure them everlaſting Goods: He ſpent the Day in preaching to them the Word of Life, and the Night in ſending up his Prayers to Heaven in their Behalf: He wrought all Sorts of Miracles amongſt them, curing their Sick, raiſing their Dead, healing their Lepers, reſtoring their Deaf, Dumb, and Blind to their perfect Senſes; and, in a Word, doing Good to every one that ſtood in Need of his Help: And all this for the Sake of a People, the moſt ungrateful that ever lived upon the Face of the Earth; and who he knew would at laſt repay all his Favours with a moſt ignominious Death.

And 'tis particularly in this laſt Scene of his Life we ought to behold him with Aſtoniſhment and Admiration: Firſt then, let us conſider him at his laſt Supper; and ſee him there proſtrate at the Traitor's Feet, waſhing and wiping them, with the ſame Marks of Love and Tenderneſs, as if he were one of his trueſt Friends. Oh! what

what a confounding Sight is this, to thoſe who ſtomach a real or imaginary Injury to that Degree, as even to refuſe to ſpeak a friendly Word, or pay the ordinary Duties of Civility to the ſuppoſed Authors of it! Proud Worms of the Earth! Can we ſee, without Bluſhing, the Son of God proſtrate before a Traitor, endeavouring to gain him by the moſt aſtoniſhing Submiſſions; can we, I ſay, ſee this, and at the ſame Time harbour a Reſentment in our Breaſts! Or think it beneath us to ſtoop to any Thing to gain our Brother! How will this Action of Chriſt confound us at the Day of Judgment, if we make it not now our Pattern! This certainly was ſuch an aſtoniſhing Act of Submiſſion, Goodneſs, and Charity, that nothing can ſurpaſs it.

However, let us ſtill go farther with him, and follow him to the Garden of *Gethſemini:* There we ſhall ſee him kiſſing and ſaluting *Judas* with the Name of Friend; and immediately after reſtoring the Ear of *Malchus*, one of thoſe that came to ſeize him: Next, let us accompany him to the Palaces of *Annas* and *Caiphas:* In the one he received a Blow on the Cheek; in the other his Enemies both buffetted him, and ſpit him in the Face: But did he return Blow for Blow, or Affront for Affront? Nothing leſs: *As a Lamb* (ſays

Iſaiah) brought to the Slaughter, and as a Sheep before the Shearers, he was dumb, and opened not his Mouth. Laſtly, let us accompany him to *Mount Calvary*, where we ſhall neither find him heaping Curſes on his Enemies, nor calling down Vengeance upon them; but, on the contrary, ſending up to Heaven his Prayers for them; earneſtly ſupplicating his Father to forgive them; nay, even apologizing for them, as far as Truth would permit; and, laſtly, dying for them.

Thus we ſee in how eminent a Manner Chriſt practiſed what he taught: We ſee his Doctrine and Example are exactly uniform, and conſpire with a wonderful Harmony to inſtruct us in our Duty, and oblige us to the Performance of it: But if no Senſe of Duty, tho' preſs'd upon us with the united Force of the plaineſt Precepts, and moſt illuſtrious Examples, be powerful enough to work upon our ſtubborn and rebellious Hearts, the Conſideration of Self-intereſt ought at leaſt to prevail upon us: We muſt therefore conſider, that *according to the Meaſure with which we ſhall meaſure to others, it will alſo be meaſured to us:* If, for ſome Injury received, we harbour Malice in our Hearts againſt the Author of it, we ſhut up the Bowels of Divine Mercy againſt us: But *if we be* eaſy in forgiving one another, the

Mercy

Mercy we ſhew him will drawn down Mercy from Heaven upon us.

The Lth ENTERTAINMENT.

It is our Intereſt to forgive and love our Enemies.

O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all thy Debt, becauſe thou deſiredſt me; ſhouldſt not thou alſo have had Compaſſion on thy Fellow-Servant. Matt. xviii. 32.

THE main Drift of the Parable, whence I have taken my Text, is to convince us, that it is our Intereſt, as well as Duty, to pardon Injuries: For the Servant mentioned in it, being ſummoned to make his Accounts, was found to be indebted *Ten Thouſand Talents* to his Lord; who, upon his humble Requeſt that he would have Patience with him, forgave him the whole Debt: But becauſe he refuſed ſoon after to forgive his Fellow-Servant the trifling Debt of a *Hundred Pence*, his Lord, juſtly moved to Indignation with this unworthy Behaviour, condemned

him

him to be delivered to the Tormentors, till he ſhould pay all that was due to him.

This is the Subſtance of the Parable, in the Moral whereof we may read the juſt Puniſhment of thoſe who die without Charity; for there is no Mercy after Death for them that ſhew no Mercy in this Life: So that whilſt they refuſe to forgive and love their Enemies, they become the worſt of Enemies to themſelves. Having therefore proved, in the foregoing Diſcourſe, that it is the indiſpenſable Duty of every Chriſtian to forgive and love his Enemies, the Subject of this ſhall be to ſhew, that it is likewiſe his trueſt Intereſt to do it.

It is certainly every Man's Intereſt to obtain the Diſcharge of an immenſe Debt, by forgiving a Trifle: Now this is our very Caſe, in Reference to Almighty God on the one hand, and our Neighbour on the other: For if we conſider the Multitude and Grievouſneſs of our Sins, and the Puniſhment due to them, we ſhall find ourſelves in the unhappy Condition of the Servant, who owed *Ten Thouſand Talents* to his Lord: But as he readily forgave him the whole Debt upon his earneſt Supplication; ſo Almighty God is ready to ſhew us the ſame Mercy, provided we imitate in ſome Meaſure his Goodneſs, in compaſſionating ſuch of our Fellow-Servants as

are

are indebted to us for ſome Offence committed againſt us; which, if compared with our grievous Offences againſt Almighty God, will not even hold the Proportion of an *Hundred Pence* to the vaſt Debt of *Ten Thouſand Talents:* Yet, upon theſe eaſy Terms, God's infinite Goodneſs offers us the Pardon of our Sins: But the Condition is indiſpenſable, and if it be not heartily and ſincerely complied with, we become accountable to God for the whole Debt we owe him, and may read our own Fate in the Sentence pronounced againſt the hard-hearted Servant in the Parable; which our Saviour concludes with theſe remarkable Words: *So likewiſe ſhall my Father do unto you, if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Treſpaſſes.* Matt. xviii. 35.

Whoever therefore has Recourſe to the ſacred Tribunal of Penance, in order to obtain the Pardon of his Sins, tho' he ſeemingly brings all the Diſpoſitions requiſite to qualify him for that Bleſſing; if he comes with a Hatred in his Heart to any Perſon in the World, he is utterly unworthy and incapable of the Mercy he pretends to: His Repentance is a Mockery; his Confeſſion is void; his Abſolution null; and, inſtead of diſcharging his Debt, he only inflames the Reckoning, and returns

back

back with the additional Guilt of Sacrilege, over and above his other Sins: So that whoever bears a Hatred to his Neighbour is in a damnable State; and if he continues and dies in it, there is no Room for Mercy for him: God will, in this Reſpect, deal with us juſt as we deal with our Neighbour; if we forgive, we ſhall be forgiven; but if we entertain deep and laſting Reſentments of Injuries received, God will alſo remember the Injuſtices we have committed againſt him.

This is clearly inſinuated in the very Prayer compoſed by Chriſt himſelf, and which we daily offer to God for the Pardon of our Sins: For in this Prayer we beg of God *to forgive us our Treſpaſſes, as we forgive them that treſpaſs againſt us.* Which, in Reference to one that bears Hatred in his Heart, is either mocking God, or curſing himſelf. For 'tis begging God's Hatred inſtead of Reconciliation, and beſpeaking a Denial of the Pardon he ſeemingly ſues for. This, I ſay, is the true Meaning of this Prayer, when it is pronounced by a Tongue that holds a Correſpondence with a Heart envenom'd with Hatred to any one. A Perſon under theſe unhappy Circumſtances cries out for Juſtice inſtead of Mercy, for Vengeance inſtead of Compaſſion: And he needs not doubt,

but

but if he perſiſts in that Unchriſtian Diſpoſition, his Prayer will be heard according to its true Meaning; and God will forgive him his Treſpaſſes, juſt as he forgives them that treſpaſs againſt him.

The ſecond Reaſon to ſhew how much it is our Intereſt to forgive and love our Enemies, is, becauſe whoever has not Charity in his Heart, loſes the Fruit of all his other Virtues. For Charity is not only the Queen and Mother, but the very Life and Soul of all Chriſtian Virtues; ſo that without it they are Dead, and can bring forth no Fruit conducing to Life everlaſting. This is the Doctrine of St. *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* xiii. *Tho' I ſpeak* (ſays he) *with Tongues of Men and Angels, and have not Charity; I am become as ſounding Braſs, or a tinkling Cymbal: And tho' I have the Gift of Prophecy, and underſtand all Myſteries; and tho' I have Faith ſo as to remove Mountains, and have not Charity, I am nothing; and tho' I beſtow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and tho' I give my Body to be burnt, and have not Charity it profits me nothing.* Thus St. *Paul*; who leaves no Room to doubt of what I have ſaid, *viz.* that without Charity, and by conſequence without the Love of our Enemies, which is a Branch of it, all other Virtues profit nothing to Salvation. Devotion without Charity, leads to Hypocriſy and Deluſion: Sacrifice and

Faſting

Faſting are of no Merit without it; and the very greateſt Auſterities and Sufferings will not entitle us to any Reward in Heaven, if Charity be not in the Heart. Nay, tho' it ſhould effectually happen, what St. *Paul* ſuppoſes, that a Perſon ſhould lay down his Life, and be burnt alive upon the Account of Religion; if he ſhould prove ſo unhappy, as at the ſame Time to harbour in his Breaſt a ſecret Hatred to his Neighbour, the Flames that ſhould conſume his Body, would not reſcue his wretched Soul from the everlaſting Flames of Hell.

It is true, it is more probable that Almighty God would in that Caſe rather permit him to renounce his Faith, and turn barefaced Apoſtate, than ſuffer ſuch an Hypocrite to appear a Champion in his Cauſe; as *Baronius* relates that it once happened at *Antioch*, to an unfortunate Prieſt called *Sapricius*, who had contracted a great Friendſhip with one *Nicephorus* a Layman. But as it often comes to paſs, that the greateſt Friendſhips turn into the greateſt Hatreds; theſe two Friends became ſuch mortal Enemies, that they could not endure to ſee or ſpeak to one another; and thus continued for a long Time, till *Nicephorus* being diſturbed with it in his Conſcience, both employ'd the Mediation of Friends, and went himſelf to *Sapricius*

to

to make his Peace with him: But *Sapricius* harden'd with Hatred, rejected all Terms of Reconciliation.

It happen'd in the mean Time, that the Emperor then reigning, raiſed a violent Perſecution againſt the Church; and great Numbers of Chriſtians being every where taken up, and impriſon'd, *Sapricius* was taken amongſt others at *Antioch*, and accuſed before the Governour of that City, of being a Chriſtian and a Prieſt; both which he boldly confeſſed, and upon his refuſing to offer Incenſe to the Idols, was caſt into a Dungeon, and condemned to the Torture, which he ſuffer'd with great Courage, and was thereupon ſentenced to loſe his Head.

As he was going to the Place of Execution, *Nicephorus*, who had been informed of what had paſſed, ran in haſte to meet him upon the Way; and falling proſtrate at his Feet, beſeeched him with many Tears to forgive him, and be reconciled to him: But *Sapricius* turning away his Head, went on, without taking Notice of him: *Nicephorus* being extremely troubled at it, and having his Heart full of true Chriſtian Concern for the imminent Danger *Sapricius* was in of periſhing eternally, took a ſhorter Way, and met him again upon his Knees, humbly beſeeching him for *Jeſus Chriſt* his

Sake,

Sake, for whom he was going to ſhed his Blood, to forget paſt Injuries, and be reconciled to him. But *Sapricius* went on as before, without giving any Mark of his being better affected towards him.

Being come to the Place of Execution, here it was that Almighty God, who had hitherto follow'd him with his holy Inſpirations, withdrew his Grace from him, and abandon'd him to his own Weakneſs: For when the Executioner was juſt going to cut off his Head, his Heart on a ſudden fail'd him; and he who had before endured the greateſt Torments, was now overcome with the Fear of an eaſy Death; and applying himſelf to the Officer that was preſent to overſee the Execution, told him he was ready to obey the Emperor's Command, if he would give him his Life, which was immediately granted. Whereupon *Nicephorus*, who beheld with a Mixture of Grief and Aſtoniſhment the viſible Juſtice of God, in the ſudden Fall of *Sapricius*; being at that Inſtant moved with a ſecret Impulſe from Heaven, ſtepp'd forward of his own Accord into the Liſt, declared himſelf a Chriſtian, was thereupon immediately ſentenced to have his Head cut off, and in Reward of his Charity carried away the glorious Crown of Martyrdom, which the other had juſtly forfeited for

for his Want of Charity, and Hardneſs of Heart.

This is a terrible Example. A Prieſt, a Confeſſor, a Martyr, as we may call him, if we conſider the Torments he had ſuffer'd; utterly abandon'd by God, for no other apparent Sin, than that of refuſing to be reconciled to his Enemy. An Example, which ought to terrify thoſe, who entertain laſting Reſentments in their Hearts: For certainly never any Man ſtood fairer for a Crown of Martyrdom, nor came nearer to the Brink of eternal Bliſs, and loſt both the one and the other, than the unfortunate *Sapricius:* We may juſtly conſider him as a Ship that returns richly laden from a long and dangerous Voyage; and is ſunk in the very Harbour: Tho' we may ſay more properly, that his Hatred to *Nicephorus turn'd all his Gold and Silver* (as *Iſaiah* expreſſes it) *into Droſs.* This was the *Ruſt*, that tarniſh'd all the Luſtre and Beauty of the glorious Sufferings he had undergone; 'twas the *Moth*, that conſumed and deſtroy'd all the precious Ornaments of his Soul, and made them of no Value in the Sight of God: So that altho' he had effectually received the Stroke of Death, unleſs Almighty God had firſt changed the Diſpoſition of his Heart, his Soul had nevertheleſs been loſt for all

Eternity.

Eternity. But it pleaſed God to prevent it, by permitting him to fall viſibly; both for his Church's Sake, and to inſtruct every Chriſtian, that even the moſt heroick Virtues in Appearance will hold no Weight in the Ballance of the Sanctuary, unleſs they be perfected by Charity, which is the Accompliſhment of the Law, and gives every Virtue its full Value.

Let us not then delude ourſelves with flattering Appearances of a firm Faith or Zeal for Religion, of ſtrong-fancied Fervours, or our being perhaps exempt from what is openly ſcandalous and criminal: For if we harbour in our Hearts a Hatred to any Perſon whatſoever, we are in the State of mortal Sin; and all our pretended Innocence and Faith will not ſave us. And truly when the Reſentment of an Injury, whether real or ſuppoſed, comes to ſuch a Height, as to cauſe a Rancour in the Mind, and a ſenſible Alteration in our Behaviour towards the Party concern'd, ſo that we can neither converſe with him, nor ſpeak friendly to him, nor pay him the ordinary Duties of Civility, we have Reaſon to ſuſpect our Souls are venom'd with it; eſpecially, if it becomes a laſting Diſpoſition.

If you ſay, it is not always in our Power to overcome Reſentments; and Injuries will ſometimes affect us very ſenſibly, whether

ther we will or no: Nay, there are even certain natural Antipathies, which we have not in our Power to correct: I anſwer that a Reſentment or Antipathy is only ſinful as far as it is voluntary. Nay, both the one and the other are conſiſtent with Charity in the Heart, and we may always make this favourable Judgment of them, when they have no Influence upon our Words or Actions to the Prejudice of the Party whom they regard: For if, in ſpite of ſuch Reſentments or Antipathies, we not only keep a Bridle upon our Tongues, when we have an itching to ſay ſome ſpiteful Thing of the Party concern'd; but are ever ready to ſpeak well of him, and do him ſuch good Offices as Occaſion ſhall preſent, we may then ſafely judge, that, being thus overuled by Charity, they are purely the Effect of Nature, and the Will has no Share in them.

Whence it follows, *firſt*, that there is a large Difference between the *Love of Charity*, and a *natural Affection*. The firſt regards our Neighbour preciſely as he bears the Image of God in his Soul; and this Love we owe to all Mankind: The ſecond regards him only as he has ſome Qualities that are agreeable to us; which therefore is uſually confined to a very narrow Compaſs.

Hence

Hence it follows, 2*dly*, that the Love we owe our Neighbour, whether Friend or Foe, conſiſts preciſely in a ſincere Deſire and Inclination of the Heart to do him Good for God's Sake. And ſince this Inclination is conſiſtent, as I have ſaid, with an involuntary Reſentment of Injuries received, 'tis evident that the Law of Charity is not violated by it, as long as we act in Contradiction to it.

However, we ought to be always very Jealous of any ſuch Reſentment; we ought to regard it as a dangerous Temptation, and be upon our Guard againſt it: Becauſe the Heart may be envenom'd by it; as we muſt judge it is, when inſtead of uſing the obvious Means to overcome it, we rather cheriſh and indulge it, by frequently muſing upon, and diſcourſing with a certain Bitterneſs, of the Injury that has been done us; when we take a Pleaſure to hear the Offender traduced, or feel a certain ſecret Joy at any Croſs that happens to him; but eſpeically when we refuſe to make reaſonable Advances toward a hearty Reconciliation with him: For theſe are all ſtrong Symptoms of a ſettled Hatred; and our ſaying in this Caſe, *I forgive him, I wiſh him no harm, I am in Charity with him*, is no more than a meer Form of Speech, which ſignifies nothing; and ſerves only to encreaſe

encreaſe the Difficulty of our Cure, by ſilencing in ſome Meaſure, the Murmurs of an uneaſy Conſcience, and flattering ourſelves into a falſe Security: For, till our Actions and Behaviour give Teſtimony, that we are truly in Charity; there lies a Snake in the Graſs, and we carry a Viper in our Breaſts, that will ſting us to Death: *For whoever loves not* (ſays St. *John*) *remains in Death.*

I own, to love an Enemy, and do good to thoſe that hate and perſecute us, is a hard Leſſon to practiſe. But ſince it is a Leſſon taught by Chriſt himſelf, ſince without it no Pardon of Sins can be obtain'd, and all other Virtues are but ſo many uſeleſs Ornaments, it is as indiſpenſable as it is hard: And therefore whatever the Difficulties are, they muſt be overcome; for, to die without Charity, is to die in a damnable State; and ſince it is ſo difficult a Leſſon to learn, we have but little Encouragement to hope to practiſe it at the Hour of Death, if we neglect it now: For Paſſions once deeply ſunk into the Soul are not to be thrown off on a ſudden; ſo that the ſame Hatred, which accompanies us to our Death-Beds, will, in all probability, follow us a Step farther, and bear us Company to the Grave; there being ſcarce any Paſſion, that when it is indulged takes a deeper Root, than that of

Hatred

Hatred and Averſion. It is eaſily remedied, if due Care be taken in the Beginning; but a long Continuance renders it very hard to be cured.

Let us beſeech Almighty God, to preſerve us from ſo dangerous an Evil; and fill our Hearts with ſuch an abundant Charity, as may at the laſt Hour, entitle our Souls to the bleſſed Joys above; where Charity reigns in her full Luſtre, uniting all the bleſſed Souls to Jeſus Chriſt, and in him to one another with a pure, diſintereſted, and unchangeable Love.

The LIſt Entertainment.

The Means to preſerve Peace with Men, by avoiding Contentiouſneſs.

If any Man be contentious, we have no ſuch Cuſtom. 1 Cor. xi. 16.

IT appears plainly from theſe Words of St. *Paul*, that the Spirit of Contention is not a Chriſtian Spirit: And the Reaſon is clear; becauſe Charity, which is a Virtue peculiarly recommended by Chriſt, cannot poſſibly be long maintain'd, either in

in a State or private Family, where the Spirit of Contention reigns.

Now this Unchriſtian Spirit is principally kept up by an indiſcreet Forwardneſs, either in thwarting Men's Humours, or contradicting their Opinions; eſpecially when they are eſpouſed with Heat. We are often faulty in not having a due Regard to the Temper of thoſe we converſe with; and being more intent upon gratifying our own Humours, than managing, with a charitable Tenderneſs, thoſe of our Neighbour: We are forward in contradicting his Opinions, becauſe we abound too much in our own Senſe; and we oppoſe his Paſſions with Heat, becauſe we are not Maſters of our own: And it is from this Indiſcretion that numberleſs Diſputes, Contentions, and Animoſities ariſe; which therefore we are bound to avoid as much as is poſſible, in order to preſerve Peace and Charity with all Men; but eſpecially with ſuch as have ſome near Relation to us, either by Proximity of Blood, or Neighbourhood, or by living under the ſame Roof, where Providence has allotted us our Station.

The Subject then of this and the following Diſcourſe ſhall be to ſhew, how wary and circumſpect we ought to be, not give Offence by an Over-fondneſs of our own Opinions, or an indiſcreet Forwardneſs

in contradicting thoſe of our Neighbour.

It is a common Weakneſs to be fond of our own Opinions, and deſirous to have them approved by others. We are fond of them, juſt as Parents are of their Children, becauſe we conſider them as our own Product, or a Part of ourſelves; and we deſire to have them approved by others, becauſe this is a kind of Conqueſt which flatters our Vanity. Hence it is that all Contradiction is more or leſs diſagreeable: Becauſe whoever contradicts another, does not only rob him of this Pleaſure, but pretends to a Superiority of Knowledge or Judgment over him, at leaſt as to the Point in Queſtion; which, being a Sort of Humiliation to a Man's natural Pride, cannot but mortify him in ſome Degree: But it is ſtill more mortifying, according as the Temper or Circumſtances of the Perſon contradicted render him more ſenſible of it, and, by conſequence, leſs able to bear it: For ſome are more capricious, or ſtiffer in their Opinions than others; and therefore leſs capable of bearing a Contradiction.

This is the Caſe, *firſt*, of thoſe who are naturally of a ſtrong Imagination. For any Thing ſtrongly fancied, fills a Man's Mind ſo, as to leave no Room for Reaſon to diſ-abuſe him; tho' he be never ſo much in the Wrong. So that ſuch an one is very like

like a Perſon placed ſo near to any Object, that he can ſee nothing beyond it.

It is, 2*dly*, the Caſe of Perſons poſſeſs'd with any Opinion, wherein the Intereſt or Reputation of a Party is concern'd: For Opinions of this Nature are generally eſpouſed with Heat; and to contradict them is the ſame as declaring War.

3*dly*, It is the Caſe of thoſe, who have been from their Infancy brought up in any Opinion; which ſeldom fails to give ſo ſtrong a Prepoſſeſſion in Favour of it, that, to contradict it, has generally no other Effect than to exaſperate the Party ſo prepoſſeſs'd, and give him a very ill Opinion both of the Judgment and good Manners of him, who declares himſelf againſt it.

Laſtly, there are certain worldly Advantages; as *Quality*, *Riches*, *Power* and the like, which contribute very much to make Men poſitive and ſtiff in their Opinions: Becauſe, theſe Perſons being generally flatter'd by thoſe that are about them, and unaccuſtom'd to Contradiction, they contract a certain Habit of thinking themſelves in the Right, becauſe they are ſeldom or never advertiſed that they are in the Wrong. So that they look upon a Man, who takes the Liberty to contradict them, as an Invader of a Right, of which they have had a long and indiſputed Poſſeſſion.

Now, tho' we ought not attribute this Weakneſs to any Perſon in particular, unleſs we can not poſſibly avoid making ſuch a Judgment of him; yet 'tis adviſable to behave ourſelves ſo towards the Generality of Men, as if they were really guilty of it. This Precaution can never hurt, and it may do good in many Occaſions; becauſe, by Means of it, we may inſinuate our ſelves into the Affection, and gain the Eſteem of thoſe, with whom we are united in Society; which will naturally diſpoſe them to hearken favourably to ſuch Advice, as, upon Occaſion, will be uſeful to them; whereas, if we ſhock them by an indiſcreet Forwardneſs in oppoſing their Sentiments, beſides the Heats and Breach of Charity it may occaſion, it cannot but leſſen our Credit with them; which we ſhould always endeavour to keep up, not ſo much for our own, as for our Neighbour's Sake; that is, to render ourſelves capable of doing him Good; which we can never hope to do, if we become diſagreeable to him; ſince the very beſt Advice loſes it's Fruit, when it comes from a Perſon, whom we neither love nor eſteem.

I know, the common Pretence of thoſe who are of a thwarting Temper, is, that it is a Charity we owe to our Neighbour, to diſ-abuſe him, when he is in an Error:

I grant

I grant the Maxim is good in general, but the Uſe of it is very nice and difficult in Practice; and requires ſeveral Conditions, to make it a real Act of that Charity, which they pretend to take for their Guide: *1ſt.* They muſt be very ſure of the main Point; *viz.* that the Opinion they oppoſe is an Error; *2d.* that their Motive, in oppoſing it, is no other than the Good of their Neighbour; which evidently ſuppoſes a Probability of Succeſs; and *3d.* that it is an Error of ſuch dangerous Conſequence, as ought to be remov'd. Now, when all theſe Conditions are carefully obſerv'd, then we may ſafely ſay, it is Charity, and not the Spirit of Contradiction, that moves us. I ſhall touch briefly upon each Particular.

Firſt then, to make Charity a juſt Pretence to contradict any Man, eſpecially with the Hazard of engaging in a hot Diſpute, we ought to be very ſure of his being in an Error. Now, to be ſure of this, it ſuffices not to have ſeemingly Reaſon on our Side; but there ought to be, in a Manner, full Evidence for it: For if this be wanting, 'tis rationally to be ſuppoſed that our Neighbour has as much Appearance of Reaſon for his Opinion, as we pretend to have for our own; and where there are Reaſons on both Sides, the Matter in Queſtion is at moſt doubtful, and either

Side may be either in the Right or Wrong: In which Caſe, 'tis a Preſumption to give a poſitive Preference to our own Opinion; and conclude peremptorily, that a Man is in the Wrong, becauſe he ſees not Things in the ſame Light as we do. For a Perſon truly humble is always rather diffident of his own Judgment, and will ſooner chooſe to err by thinking himſelf in the Wrong, when he has the Truth of the Queſtion on his Side, than by not yielding to it when it is againſt him.

But ſuppoſing now there is clear Evidence that our Neighbour is in an Error; the next Thing to be conſider'd, before we undertake to contradict him, is, whether it be an Error of that Conſequence as ought to be removed: That is, whether there be a Danger of ſome conſiderable Prejudice either to his ſpiritual or temporal Good, if he ſhould perſiſt in it: For in this Caſe 'tis certainly a charitable Office to endeavour to diſ-abuſe him: But if no ſuch Danger appears, and neither his Reputation, nor Intereſt of Soul or Body be concern'd, 'tis generally better to leave him in Poſſeſſion of his Error, than hazard a Diſpute about it. The Reaſon hereof is clear; becauſe tho' Truth be always a real Good, and Error a Sort of Evil, yet if the Remedy be dangerous, or even worſe than the Evil

Evil we pretend to cure by it, 'tis both charitable and prudent to forbear uſing it; conſidering eſpecially, that by this Moderation in over-looking trivial Miſtakes, we may become more capable of ſerving our Neighbour in Occaſions of greater Importance.

Our Saviour himſelf has ſufficiently recommended this Rule by his own Practice: For, tho' he was full of all Truth, and had a perfect Knowledge of every Thing; he only deliver'd thoſe ſacred Truths, in which God's Honour and the Good of Souls were concern'd: It is true, he diſcover'd the Falſehood of ſome apochryphal Traditions of the *Phariſees*; becauſe the more ignorant Sort were miſled by them, to the Prejudice of their Salvation: But, as to Errors in *Philoſophy*, *Hiſtory*, *Phyſick*, *Eloquence*, or other human Sciences, tho' they were numberleſs, and perfectly known by him, he neither undertook to confute any of them himſelf, nor ever charged his Apoſtles to do it; but left every Man the Freedom of his own Way of Thinking, tho' never ſo much ſubject to Errors and Miſtakes.

Now, ſince we are not bound to be more charitable than Chriſt or his Apoſtles; it follows, that in Matters of no Conſequence, 'tis better to let any Opinion prevail, tho' never ſo erroneous, than to hazard the ordinary Heats and Contentions

of a Diſpute, to confute it; becauſe the Good we aim at, in endeavouring to rectify a Man's Intellect, bears no Proportion to the Evil we hazard in exaſperating his Mind; and Peace is always preferable to a trivial Truth: Is there not, many Times, as much Noiſe and Conteſt about meer Trifles, as if the Fundamentals of Religion were at Stake? And what is the Source of all this Heat and Striſe, in which Charity is ſo often moſt grievouſly wounded? Zeal for Truth is the uſual Pretence, but Pride is but too often the real Cauſe. We cannot bear, without ſome Reſentment, to ſee Men differ from us in their Opinions; and the Ground of this Reſentment is not ſo much, becauſe their Opinions are contrary to the Truth, as becauſe they are contrary to our Judgment; which we look upon as undervalued, by not being ſubmitted to.

There is, I know not how, a ſecret Ambition in our Nature to over-top others even in the moſt trivial Things; which St. *Auſtin* calls *Superbæ Victoriæ*, proud Victories, and of which he accuſes himſelf in his *Confeſſions*: But no Conqueſt flatters our Vanity with a more ſenſible Pleaſure, than that of Knowledge or Underſtanding; and I doubt not but it happens many Times, that a Perſon dictating in a private Aſſembly, and fancying himſelf to be the Oracle of the

the Company, is guilty of a deeper Pride, than a General at the Head of a victorious Army: This Deſire of ſurpaſſing in Knowledge, is amongſt young Scholars call'd *Emulation*; and encouraged by their Maſters, as a Spur to Learning; but I fear, it proves but too often the Nouriſhment of a Pride, which ſticks by them as long as they live; and renders them, by Reaſon of their Poſitiveneſs and Arrogance, both inſupportable to Men, and hateful to God.

But how far ſoever this Reflection may be true, 'tis certain, that the Deſire of Domineering over other Men's Judgments, is a prevailing Paſſion in our Nature; and therefore when we find ourſelves diſappointed, in not meeting with all the Deference and Submiſſion we expect, we take it as an Affront done to our Judgment; we grow waſpiſh and impatient, and ſeek immediately to revenge ourſelves, by muſtering up all our Reaſons to convince him, that we underſtand Things better than he: Not that we are concern'd for his being in an Error; but our whole Concern is to do juſtice to ourſelves, by forcing him, by the Dint of Argument, to ſee and own it: And whereas we ought to reſt ſatisfied with the Conſciouſneſs of having Truth on our Side; we ſeek moreover the malignant Pleaſure of mortifying our Neigh-

bour by extorting from him an Acknowledgment that we are in the Right, and he is in the Wrong.

This is the uſual Source of Contradiction, and the Root of that Heat and Contention about Things of no Moment, which ſeldom fails to wound Charity, and often utterly deſtroys it: But put the Caſe now, that there is not only clear Evidence of our Neighbour's being in an Error; but that it is an Error of ſuch Conſequence, as will be very prejudicial to him, if he perſiſts in it: The Queſtion then is, how far the Duty of Charity obliges us to uſe Endeavours to undeceive him? Now 'tis certain, that before we make any Attempts towards it, we ought to conſider, whether there be a Proſpect of Succeſs; and the principal Points to be examined are, *firſt*, whether we have Credit enough with the Party concern'd to preſume that he will hearken favourably to us. 2*dly*. whether we have a ſufficient Talent of Perſuading; or whether we ſhall not rather prejudice the Cauſe of Truth, than promote it: And 3*dly*. whether the Party concern'd be of a Temper to bear a Contradiction: For, if we have ſufficient Grounds to judge, that either we ourſelves are unqualified to maintain our Point, or he to yield to Truth; the diſcreeteſt Part we can take is that of Silence: becauſe,

becauſe, ſince the principal End of Charity is the Good of our Neighbour, the Obligation of it ceaſes of Courſe, when there is no Proſpect to bring about that End, from whatever Cauſe the Obſtacle to it may proceed.

This Rule alone cuts off almoſt all perſonal Diſputes about Religion. For Experience ſhews but too plainly how unſucceſful ſuch Diſputes uſually are. This is many Times occaſion'd by the Incapacity of thoſe, who will needs ſet up for Champions of the Faith, when they neither have Knowledge nor Temper enough to manage a Diſpute to the Advantage of their Cauſe; and ſo Truth is rather prejudiced than promoted by their Zeal: And therefore, the beſt Thing they can do, is to wave all ſuch Diſputes; and make Converts by the Fervour of their Prayers, and Example of a holy Life: For when Perſons are unqualified for Combats of this Nature, their Caſe is much the ſame with that of *Joſephus* and *Azarias* mentioned in the Book of *Maccabees*, who being ambitious to get a Name by Fighting, would needs hazard a Battle with their Enemies, contrary to the Orders they had received from *Judas Maccabeus*; and the Succeſs proved anſwerable to the Raſhneſs of their Undertaking: For their

whole,

whole Army was defeated; and the Scripture gives this Reaſon of it, *becauſe they were not of the Race of thoſe Men, by whom* Iſrael *was to be ſaved.* Now every Man is not made to be a Defender of the Faith; and they who have no Talent for it, may be ſure it is no Part of their Calling; and that God requires no more of them than the Edification of a Chriſtian Life; which is the beſt Proof they can give of the Truth of the Religion they profeſs.

But let a Perſon be never ſo capable of maintaining the Truth, yet if the adverſe Party be harden'd againſt it, either by natural Obſtinacy, Intereſt, or Prejudice of Education, 'tis all Labour loſt to attempt to undeceive him: Such a one is blind, becauſe he will be ſo; and if you will needs force him to open his Eyes by the Dint of Argument and Reaſon, 'twill have no other Effect, than to make him ſhut them the cloſer, that he may not ſee the Light, which would convince him of his Error. A Perſon, under theſe Circumſtances, *hates the Light*, as Chriſt expreſſes it; and the clearer it is, the more it offends him: And therefore, ſince doing an ungrateful Thing can never be a proper Means to make Converts, it follows that Diſputes in this Caſe can be of no Manner of Uſe, but will rather ſerve to make

make the adverſe Party more obſtinate in his Error: Oppoſition and Contradiction will but put him upon his Guard, and excite him to a more induſtrious Application to elude or baffle the Reaſons you bring to convince him.

So that 'tis plain, that Charity cannot be the Motive of entring into Diſputes with Perſons thus diſpoſed; ſince there can be no Charity in applying Remedies, which will only inflame the Diſtemper: And therefore, in Caſes like this, a modeſt Silence is ever preferable to a noiſy Diſpute: And if our Charity be diſappointed by it in its Deſire of propagating the Truth; it finds at leaſt its Account in preſerving Peace, which is always a deſirable Good, and expreſly recommended by St. *Paul*, who exhorts us *to have Peace with all Men, as far as is poſſible*; nay, and by Chriſt himſelf, who ſtiles all Lovers of Peace *Bleſſed*; and aſſures them that they ſhall be in a ſpecial Manner called *the Children of God.*

The

The LIId ENTERTAINMENT.

The ſame Subject continued.

If it be poſſible, as much as lieth in you, have Peace with all Men. Rom. xii. 18.

I Have ſhewed, in my laſt Diſcourſe, how wary we ought to be not to give Offence, by an indiſcreet Forwardneſs, in contradicting our Neighbour: However, ſince an unreaſonable Conſtraint would utterly deſtroy the principal Fruit of Society; becauſe the chief End of Converſation is to communicate our Thoughts to one another, which cannot be done, unleſs Men have a decent Freedom allowed them to ſpeak their Mind; and ſince it may alſo be reaſonably ſuppoſed, that all Men are not of that obſtinate Temper, as to be fond of their Errors, eſpecially in Matters of Importance; it follows, that a modeſt Contradiction may be both uſeful and acceptable in certain Occaſions, and abſolutely neceſſary in others; namely, when there is a Probability that our Speaking will be profitable, and our Silence prejudicial to the ſpiritual or temporal Good of our Neighbour: The only Point then that remains

remains to be examined is, what Precautions are neceſſary, in order to prevent our giving Offence in the Manner of Contradicting; which ſhall be the Subject of this Diſcourſe.

Oppoſing Mens Opinions or Inclinations, even in Matters wherein their Intereſt or Honour is concerned, is one of thoſe ungrateful charitable Offices which muſt be managed with the utmoſt Tenderneſs: For, tho' Neceſſity cannot but juſtify the doing a harſh Thing, nothing can juſtify the doing it in a harſh Way; and, in Reality, 'tis not ſo much the Harſhneſs of the Thing itſelf, as the Manner of doing it, that often gives Offence; becauſe it makes Men judge, that our principal Aim is not to do them Good, but to take a Pleaſure in giving them Pain; and whenever any one has that Opinion of us, all we can ſay to him is received with Prejudice, and loſt upon him.

Hence it is that fraternal Correction, admoniſhing a Perſon of his Faults, or adviſing him contrary to his Inclinations, tho' they be all charitable Offices, and many Times abſolutely neceſſary, yet become very often fruitleſs, becauſe we are not careful enough to correct the Bitterneſs, which is inſeparable from theſe Duties; but rather increaſe it, by mixing ſome of our own

Gal

Gall with it: And ſo 'tis in the Caſe of contradicting Mens Opinions; the doing it, in many Caſes, carries Bitterneſs with it; but the Way of doing it may be ſo temper'd with Sweetneſs, that no reaſonable Perſon can take Offence at it.

I will not, however, pretend to give Rules ſo univerſal, as ſhall ſuit all Perſons and Conditions; they will ariſe naturally from the Occaſions we fall into, and the Difference of Circumſtances muſt in a great Meaſure lead us to them: For the Way of treating with thoſe that are above us, either in Quality or Authority, is certainly very different from that of converſing with Equals or Inferiors: Superiors are not to be ſpoken to but with Deference and Reſpect: A ſmart or ſnappiſh Way of contradicting them is both unmannerly and undutiful; and a Perſon ſurpriſed into this Fault ought to make ſome Atonement for it upon the Spot: All Manner of Civility is likewiſe due to Equals, when we deliver our Sentiments in Oppoſition to theirs; and even Inferiors have a Title to a certain Affability, which may make them, in ſome Meaſure, forget the Lowneſs of their State: So that a Regard is certainly to be had to the Difference of Perſons and Conditions; and the only general Rule, I know of, is to ſtudy the Humour and

Temper

Temper of thoſe, with whom we are moſt converſant; and accommodate ourſelves to it, as the *Apoſtle* did, by *becoming all to all in order to gain all to Chriſt.* This indeed requires a great Stock of Virtue, without which no Man can be equal and uniform in the Practice of this Rule: Which made a modern Author obſerve, very judiciouſly, that *nothing is ſo well-bred as a good Chriſtian*; becauſe, a good Chriſtian is charitable, meek, and humble; and almoſt all Treſpaſſes againſt good Manners, which offend our Neighbour, are the Fruit of *Pride*, *Selfiſhneſs*, and a *rough immortified Temper:* So that wherever Charity abounds, and is joyned with a meek and humble Heart, there will be but little Need of Rules or Precepts. An obliging Air, and the Art of pleaſing in all incident Occaſions, will reſult naturally from it.

They, who have their Dependance at Court, and ſeek to make their Fortune that Way, are perfectly verſed in this Art: Becauſe, a diſcreet and well-manag'd Self-love, which is the perfecteſt Mimick of Charity, governs them in all they do: Hence it is, that nothing appears ſo meek, ſo humble, ſo obliging, as the Behaviour of theſe Men: They make it their Buſineſs to ſtudy the Humour of the Prince, or favourite Miniſter, to whom they make

their

their Court; they approach him with the greateſt Reſpect; watch the moſt favourable Moments for it; and weigh every Word they have to ſay, for fear of giving the leaſt Offence. Now, when *Charity* abounds in Chriſtians, as much as *Self-love* does in the Children of this World, it produces the very ſame Effects in their outward Behaviour: I mean, the ſame Attention to pleaſe, and the ſame Precautions to avoid every Thing, which, by diſpleaſing, may fruſtrate the End they aim at, of doing good to their Neighbour.

Charity therefore is the beſt Rule, and the ſureſt Guide in all the different Occurrences of Human Life, when any ungrateful Duty is to be performed; as is that, when the Good of our Neighbour obliges us to oppoſe his Inclinations, or contradict his Sentiments; and maintain ſome Truth, which is diſagreeable to him. For whoever conſults the Rule of Charity, will be ſure, at leaſt, to avoid in the Caſe mention'd, ſuch Faults, as are directly oppoſite to it's principal End.

The firſt of theſe, is a certain *deciſive Air* in delivering our Opinions. This is very ungrateful in any Perſon whatever, let his Capacity or Character be what it will. The Reaſon is, *Firſt*, Becauſe this Way of deciding dogmatically, carries with

with it an Air of Preſumption and Self-conceit; which all Men hate, and no Superiority of Wit or Condition can juſtify: And *ſecondly*, Becauſe it betrays a ſecret Ambition of domineering over, and captivating all Men's Judgments to their own; which is nothing leſs than invading a Liberty, to which all Men have a natural Right, of uſing their own Reaſon; and may be called a Kind of Tyranny in Converſation.

They who are guilty of this Fault, whenever their Reaſons will not convince, are apt to proceed to open, or at leaſt tacit Reproaches; as by ſaying, *that what they advance is unconteſtable*; *that they are ſurpriſed, how any Man of Senſe can doubt of it*; and the like: Which in Effect, is nothing leſs than accuſing a Man, either of Stupidity in not ſeeing, or of wilful Obſticy in not yielding to clear Reaſon. Now this is certainly a very improper Way to bring Men over to the Truth: Becauſe, we may be ſure, that they who are not, or will not be convinced by our Reaſons, will never be converted by our Reproaches: For Reproaches add no Weight to Reaſons, nor ſerve any Way to ſet them in a clearer Light; but only betray a Want of Temper, and an exceſſive Stiffneſs in our own Opinion.

Another

Another Fault to be avoided in the Manner of contradicting, is the doing it with an Air of Contempt: As by telling a Perſon, *that we pity his Ignorance, or think it not worth our Pains to undeceive him*; or expreſſing our Diſdain of him by a ſcornful Look or Geſture. This reliſhes of Arrogance, and is highly provoking; becauſe as the Love of Eſteem is one of the moſt predominant Paſſions of human Nature, and ought therefore to be managed with the greateſt Tenderneſs; ſo nothing wounds it more ſenſibly, than any Mark of Contempt; which made St. *Paul* exhort all Chriſtians to prevent one another with Demonſtrations of Eſteem and Reſpect; *honore invicem prævenientes*; and we ought always to look upon it as a Treſpaſs againſt the Charity we owe our Neighbour, to give him to underſtand either by Words or Actions, that we have no Eſteem for him; becauſe by ſo doing, we ſhut up the moſt natural Way, by which we have acceſs to his Heart, and by rendring ourſelves odious, become wholly unuſeful to him.

Finally, a third Fault to be avoided in the Manner of Contradicting, is the doing it with too much Heat; becauſe all Heat and Paſſion is not only contrary to Chriſtian Modeſty, but likewiſe apt to provoke thoſe

thoſe of the contrary Opinion, to retaliate upon us with the ſame Heat, and ſo turn Converſation into mere Noiſe and Clamour; the uſual Conſequence whereof is ſcurrilous or reflecting Language; and one Word drawing on another, a Breach of Peace and Charity muſt follow of courſe.

But beſides this Inconvenience, which is conſiderable; any Degree of Heat in Diſputes is prejudicial to the Cauſe of Truth. *Firſt*, Becauſe it looks like offering Violence to a Man's Reaſon, and coming upon him with an arm'd Force; which, inſtead of convincing, ſerves rather to provoke him to a more obſtinate Reſiſtance: And *ſecondly*, Becauſe whoever maintains an Opinion with Heat, is juſtly ſuſpected to adhere to it rather out of Paſſion, than Conviction of Reaſon; which naturally gives a Prepoſſeſſion againſt it, and takes off from the Weight of the Reaſons for it.

Beſides, Paſſion always obſcures Reaſon more or leſs, and diſables it from exerting itſelf; whereas he who poſſeſſes himſelf, is both Maſter of his Reaſon in its full Extent, and has Words much better at Command, to ſet forth his Thoughts in the moſt advantageous Light. Truth in the Mouth of ſuch a Perſon, appears in its full Strength and Beauty; and whether the adverſe Party yields to it or not, he

has

has at leaſt the Comfort of being conſcious to himſelf, that he has acted both like a good Chriſtian, and a Man of good Senſe.

Theſe therefore are the principal Faults to be avoided in the Manner of Contradicting, and in all other Caſes, when Charity obliges us to ſpeak any ungrateful Truth: Care muſt be taken in all ſuch Occurrences to ſeaſon our Diſcourſe ſo, with obliging Expreſſions, and an Air of Modeſty; that the Party to whom we ſpeak, may be convinced that nothing but our Concern for his Good, could have induced us to undertake ſo diſagreeable a Taſk; that we even offer Violence to our Nature, and ſuffer much more Pain, than we can poſſibly give him in the doing of it.

Some perhaps will be apt to think, that Civility, and good Manners in this as well as other Caſes, are but the ornamental Part of human Life, but no Part of Chriſtian Duty. But this is a great Miſtake; for Civility is not only itſelf a moral Virtue, but every Branch of it has its Root in ſome Principle of the Goſpel. Is not almoſt all Morality, as it regards our Neighbour, epitomized in the ſhort Precept of *Bearing* and *Forbearing?* And how would Chriſtians abound in good Manners, if they but made this Precept the Rule and Standard of their Behaviour? How happy would all

Societies

Societies be, in which each Member performed this Part towards the maintaining the common Peace? For, by Virtue of this Rule alone, we ſhould neither wilfully give Offence, nor eaſily take Offence, at leaſt at the ordinary Slips of Inadvertency or Surpriſe. All Arrogance, Contentiouſneſs, Ill-humour or Caprice would be utterly baniſhed out of Chriſtian Aſſemblies; and we may confidently ſay, that whoever has that conſtant Guard upon himſelf, as to be careful neither to *give* nor *take Offence*, has a juſt Title to the Character of what we call a well-bred Man. But ſince it is morally impoſſible a Perſon ſhould be always equal and uniform in this Practice, without the Help of the Chriſtian Virtues of *Humility*, *Meekneſs*, and particularly the Virtue of *Charity*; it follows, that Civility is grounded upon the very Maxims of the Goſpel, and that Chriſtianity is the only ſolid and laſting Foundation of it.

But to ſhew, that even the moſt ordinary Duties of Civility, I mean ſuch as are eſtabliſhed by mere Cuſtom, have alſo their Foundation in the Law of God; I ſhall conclude, with tranſlating the excellent Thoughts of a *French* Author upon this Subject. *God*, ſays he, *has been pleaſed to order the World ſo, that Men ſhould be united together in Society by a mutual* Dependence

pendence upon one another: So that the one being not able to live in any comfortable Manner without the other's Help; this Bond of mutual Society ſhould not only be uſeful, but abſolutely neceſſary. Whence it follows, that whatever conduces to keep up this Society, comes within the Order of this providential Diſpoſition; and is in ſome Meaſure commanded by God, in Virtue of the Law of Nature, which obliges each Part to contribute to the Good of the Whole.

Now this Society cannot poſſibly ſubſiſt but by a reciprocal Love and Eſteem of the Members, whereof it is compoſed: For Hatred or Contempt break the Ties that hold it together, and are infallible Cauſes of Diviſion; becauſe Mankind being a Body compoſed of Perſons, who naturally love and eſteem themſelves; and by conſequence covet to be loved and eſteemed by others; if they ſhould mutually neglect this Way of rendring themſelves agreeable and uſeful, the whole World would be no better than a jarring Multitude of Malecontents, diſſatisfied with one another, and weary of their own Condition: Beſides, there being innumerable little Things, which cannot be ſtipulated for by way of Bargain, and are only to be purchaſed for Love, and yet contribute very much towards the Convenience and Comfort of Life; it follows, that there can be no other

other laſting Bond of Society, than that of mutual Love and Eſteem.

But ſince theſe Qualities are lodged in the Heart, and are therefore imperceptible to Senſe, unleſs they manifeſt themſelves by ſome outward Effects; hence it is that Men, by a kind of univerſal tacit Agreement, have introduced certain outward Forms of Civility; as Viſits, mutual Salutations, Compliments of Congratulation or Condolence, and the like; which ſhould ſerve as viſible Tokens of their inward Reſpect and Love for each other; the Conſequence whereof is, that to be wanting to theſe Duties, is looked upon as a Mark of Indifference or Diſeſteem: So that all thoſe who have a Claim to our Eſteem or Love, have the ſame Title to the outward Civilities, which Cuſtom has eſtabliſhed as Tokens of them; and the Omiſſion of them renders us guilty of Injuſtice, by ſhewing a Diſpoſition contrary to what we really owe them: We are therefore bound to be punctual in all ſuch Duties; and the Motive of this Exactneſs, is not only conformable to Reaſon, but commanded by God.

Theſe are the Sentiments of this Author; and they are truly Chriſtian and Noble: For they teach us the Art of pleaſing Men, and gaining their Eſteem and Love; not upon mean Principles of Intereſt or Vanity, but upon a higher Conſideration of

pleaſing and obeying God: They inſtruct us in the Method of a ſort of Chriſtian Thrift and Management; by making the beſt of ſuch Occurences, as we almoſt daily meet with: They ſhew us how to give a Value to the moſt indifferent Actions, which we uſually throw away: Finally, we learn from them the true Secret of living peaceably with all Men, and in all Places and Families, where Providence has appointed us our Station; which it is impoſſible to do, if we frequently ſhock Men by our Words or Actions, or neglect to pay them the Civilities, they juſtly expect from us: For this gives Occaſion to Diſcontents, Murmurs, and Reproaches; cauſes at firſt Indifference and Coldneſs, and ſoon after Hatred and Averſion.

But, if this Care of cultivating and preſerving Peace with all Chriſtians in general, be neceſſary; 'tis of much greater Conſequence in Reference to Perſons united together by ſome particular Tie; and of the greateſt imaginable to married Perſons. Theſe ought to be as much afraid to give Offence, as to give Poiſon to one another: Their Study ought to be to pleaſe mutually, by all the Endearments, and reciprocal Compliances, that are within the Law of God: For if either of the Parties makes a *ſlight* Matter of ſhocking the other by any

any Ill-humour, Capriciouſneſs or thwarting Temper, it will unavoidably create an Uneaſineſs: This Uneaſineſs will ſoon change the moſt tender Affection into Coldneſs and Indifference; and 'tis particularly in the Conjugal State that Coldneſs and Indifference are but one Remove from Hatred and Averſion; and no Hatred is more irreconcileable than that of married Perſons. *Firſt*, Becauſe the hated Object is daily preſent: And *ſecondly*, Becauſe it is always grounded upon a Reſentment of a real or ſuppoſed Ingratitude; which is the hardeſt to be forgiven.

Theſe therefore are principally concern'd in all that has been ſaid of *Diſputes*, ſpeaking *ungrateful Truths*, *Contradiction*, and the uſual Faults committed in the manner of it. Their Obligation of avoiding all ſuch Faults, is conſiderably enforced by the Circumſtances of their State, which cannot but be unhappy without mutual Love and Eſteem; and it is morally impoſſible this Love and Eſteem ſhould be preſerved amidſt frequent Jars, Diſputes, and Contradictions; tho' they be but about trifling Things. Nay, the ſmaller the Thing is, about which the Diſpute ariſes, the greater is the Indiſcretion; becauſe the Miſchief it occaſions, is eaſier to be avoided: The Cauſe may be a Triſle, when the Effects and Conſequences of it are far

from being ſo; ſince nothing happens more frequently, than that amidſt warm Diſputes about Things of no Moment, the Parties inſenſibly conceive an Averſion towards each other, and part with the higheſt Diſſatisfaction on both Sides: And when this happens to be the Caſe of married Perſons, there's an End of Peace and Happineſs in that Family.

I ſhall end with St. *Paul's* Exhortation; *have Peace with all Men, if it be poſſible.* Be not Lovers of Contention and Strife, but be Lovers of Peace; and the Bleſſings promiſed to the Peaceful will attend you, both in this Life, and in the Life to come.

The LIIId Entertainment.

Of Devotion to the bleſſed Virgin.

Hail, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Luke i. 28.

THESE ſacred Words, wherewith the *Bleſſed Virgin* was ſaluted by the Angel *Gabriel*, contain the principal Grounds of that Devotion, which the Church has always paid her: For tho' we pay a proportionable Degree of Honour to all God's

God's Saints, and implore the Aſſiſtance of their Prayers, yet the Mother of God is juſtly honour'd with peculiar Marks of Diſtinction; and the great Number of ſolemn Days, ſet apart to perpetuate the Memory of Favours beſtow'd upon her by Almighty God, are a convincing Proof, that the Church is under a more than ordinary Solicitude to encourage and promote the Devotion of the Faithful to her: Nor can it be doubted, but that they who perform this Devotion according to the true Spirit and Intention of the Church, will reap the Fruit of it in a continual Improvement in ſolid Virtue. The Subject then of this Diſcourſe ſhall be to ſet forth the principal Grounds of this Devotion; that is, the proper Motives to encourage us to it.

To prevent all Miſtakes relating to this Matter; we muſt lay it down as an undoubted Maxim of Faith, that whatever Excellencies we attribute to the *Bleſſed Virgin*, or whatever Terms we make uſe of to expreſs the Eſteem and Reſpect we have for her, we muſt regard her no otherwiſe than as a *pure Creature*; and, by conſequence, infinitely below God, depending on him, and indebted to him for all the Gifts of Nature and Grace She poſſeſs'd in this Life, and the eminent Degree of Glory to which She is exalted in Heaven. So

that our Devotion to the *Bleſſed Virgin*, like that to other Saints, is a *Relative Honour*; redounding effectually upon, and terminating wholly in God. In honouring her, we honour God much more; and praiſing and admiring her eminent Virtues, we only proclaim the infinite Power and Bounties of her Divine Maker, who could enrich a pure Creature with ſuch excellent Gifts.

And in this we conform ourſelves exactly to the humble Sentiments She had of herſelf; and verify literally her Prophecy deliver'd in theſe Words: *For behold all Generations ſhall call me bleſſed; becauſe he who is powerful has done great Things to me.* By which Words, the Honour and Devotion which the Catholick Church has paid her throughout all Ages, down to this Time, and will continue to pay her to the End of the World, is preciſely mark'd out to us. But She ſays not that this Honour ſhall be paid her for any Thing ſhe has of herſelf; but *becauſe he who is powerful has done great Things to her:* That is, has beſtow'd upon her Gifts and Bleſſings ſurpaſſing all human Power. Which Part of the Prophecy would not be fullfilled, if the Church, in honouring the *Bleſſed Virgin*, meant any Thing elſe, but to honour God's Bleſſings in her. Whoever goes beyond this, or pretends to raiſe her

her above the Rank of a *pure Creature*, and ſet her upon the Level with her Son, is guilty of Impiety and Blaſphemy; and falls into the Hereſy of the *Collyridians*, a mad Sect of bigotted Women of *Thrace*; who are reckon'd amongſt the Number of antient Hereticks by St. *Epiphanius*, for wo ſhipping the *Bleſſed Virgin*, as a kind of *Goddeſs*, and aſſuming to themſelves the Prieſtly Character, in *Offering Sacrifice* to her: For this, I ſay, they are condemn'd by St. *Epiphanius*, as guilty of an impious, extravagant, and ſacrilegious Devotion; and not barely for invoking the *Bleſſed Virgin*, as will appear manifeſt to any Man, that will but give himſelf the Trouble to read St. *Epiphanius* upon this Subject. *L.* 3. *Tom.* 3. *Hæreſi* 78, 79.

This therefore is the Doctrine of the Catholick Church, *viz.* That the *Bleſſed Virgin* is a *pure Creature*; that She is to be honour'd no otherwiſe than as ſuch; or, as St. *Epiphanius* expreſſes it, *non ultra modum & decorem*, not beyond the Bounds of *Moderation* and *Decency*. Finally, that it is Sacrilege and Idolatry to offer Sacrifice to her, or pay her that Worſhip, which is due to God alone. But tho' She be a pure Creature, we may ſafely ſay, She is the moſt excellent that ever was created: And this ſuffices abundantly to juſtify the

Titles and Honours decreed her by the Church, and all thoſe pompous Elogiums of her, tranſmitted to us in the Writings of the Holy Fathers. I ſhould run out into an exceſſive Length, if I ſhould tranſcribe any conſiderable Part of them: I will therefore content myſelf with one out of St. *John Chryſoſtome*, deliver'd in theſe Words.

" The Ever-*Bleſſed Virgin Mary*, ſays " he, is ſurely a great Miracle: For, what " has ever been, or ever will be greater " or more excellent than She? She alone " ſurpaſſes in greatneſs both Heaven and " Earth. What was ever more pure and " holy? Neither *Prophets*, nor *Martyrs*, " nor *Patriarchs*, nor *Angels*, nor *Thrones*, " nor *Powers*, nor *Seraphin*, nor any " Thing amongſt Creatures, whether vi- " ſible or inviſible, can be found greater or " more excellent than She is: She is both " Hand-maid and Mother of God; both " Mother and Virgin. She is Mother of " him, who was begotten of the Father " before all Beginning; whom Angels " and Men own to be the Lord of all " Things. Do you deſire to know how " far the *Virgin Mary* ſurpaſſes the hea- " venly Powers? They ſtand before the " Throne with Fear and Trembling, co- " vering their Faces; but She preſents

" Mankind

" Mankind to him whom She begot; and " 'tis through Her we obtain the Pardon " of our Sins".

This is St. *Chryſoſtome*'s Elogium of the *Bleſſed Virgin*; which he concludes with this Prayer to Her.

" Wherefore, hail *Virgin* and *Mother*; " the *Honour*, *Glory*, and *Pillar* of the " Church; pray continually for us to *Je-* " *ſus Chriſt*, your Son, and our Lord; that " through thee we may find Mercy in the " Day of Judgment, and obtain thoſe " Bleſſings which are laid up for thoſe who " love God, by the Grace and Bounty of " *Jeſus Chriſt* our Lord".

Here we ſee this great Saint and Champion of the Catholick Faith, *firſt*, makes the Panygerick of the *Bleſſed Virgin*, in ſuch lofty Terms; that if any one ſhould do the ſame now, he would perhaps have been accuſed of having overſtrain'd his Matter; and, *ſecondly*, moved with the Conſideration of her ſuperior Excellencies above all other Creatures, and excited thereby to a Confidence in her holy Interceſſion, he humbly begs of her to pray for him to Her Son, *that he may obtain the Bleſſings laid up for thoſe who love God.*

Whence it follows, that as Praying to the *Bleſſed Virgin* was the Devotion and Practice of the Church in his Time; ſo by his

ſaying, *that 'tis through her we obtain the Pardon of our Sins*, and again, *that through her we may find Mercy in the Day of Judgment*, he only means, through her *Interceſſion*; to which her eminent Holineſs and Merits give doubtleſs a great Efficacy and Weight: For it has always been the undoubted Faith of the Church, *1ſt*, That *Jeſus Chriſt* is the only *Mediator* of *Redemption*; *2dly*, That he alone has *immediate Acceſs* to God, without the Mediation of any other; and that, by conſequence, the Prayers of *Saints* and *Angels* in Heaven, as well as of the Faithful upon Earth, are all offered up through the Mediation of *Jeſus Chriſt*; and, *3dly*, That there is no Salvation but through him; according to that ſolemn Declaration of St. *Peter*, before the Prieſts and Princes of the *Jews*, Acts iv. *There is no Salvation in any other; nor is there any other Name under Heaven given to Men, in which they can be ſaved:* So that the *Bleſſed Virgin*, in her now glorious State in Heaven, has no other Part in the Salvation of Men, but that of *begging* and *interceding* for them. *Chriſt* alone is the *Propitiation for our Sins*; He alone is our *Mediator* of *Reconciliation* or *Redemption*; becauſe he alone has paid our Ranſom. The *Bleſſed Virgin* aſpires to no ſuch Honour; but being placed before the Throne,

Throne, at the Head of all the *Saints* and *Angels*, preſents our Petitions to God, and joins her Prayers with ours, to render them acceptable to him: This is the Part She now acts in the Salvation of Men; this is the Ground of our Truſt and Confidence in her; and we ſhall find our Hopes built upon a very ſolid Foundation, if we but conſider the extraordinary Favours beſtowed upon her by Almighty God in this Life, and the eminent Rank She now holds in Heaven.

The *firſt* extraordinary Grace then beſtowed upon her was, her being elected, from all Eternity, to be the *Mother of God*; a Dignity of ſo high a Rank, that nothing in this World ever approached near it: For by Virtue of this Election, She was choſen to be, next after Chriſt, the principal Inſtrument of Man's Redemption: By Virtue of the ſame She was choſen to be, by the neareſt Relation a pure Creature is capable of, the immaculate Spouſe of God the Father, *viz.* in becoming truly Mother of him in Time, who was begotten of the Father from all Eternity: Hence alſo this great Title of *Queen of Heaven*, wherewith the Church ſalutes her, became due to her; and by this Title, we may conceive her as much above the Angels and Saints, as a Queen is above her

her Subjects upon Earth: But ſince the Rank allotted to each one in Heaven, is anſwerable to the Degree he has of Purity and Holineſs; becauſe Glory is the Reward of Virtue and Merit; it follows, that as the *Bleſſed Virgin* was predeſtinated from all Eternity, to be the *Mother of God*, and *Queen of Heaven*; ſo God took Care to fit her for that eminent Dignity, by enriching her Soul with the moſt exquiſite Treaſures of Grace and Virtues, that ever were beſtowed on any pure Creature.

Hence flows the *ſecond* extraordinary Favour beſtowed upon her, *viz.* her being ſanctified in her Mother's Womb, in the very Moment of her Conception: For which Reaſon, She is the only Saint upon Earth, whoſe *Conception* as well as *Nativity* is ſolemnized in the Church by a particular Feaſt; becauſe Holy-Days are inſtituted only in Honour of Perſons, ſuppoſed to be in the State of Grace, at the Time to which thoſe Feaſts have a Relation.

Whence alſo flows a *third* extraordinary Favour, *viz.* her having been preſerved, throughout the whole Courſe of her Life, from all Spot or Stain of *actual Sin*. Her *Reaſon* was never obſcured by any Paſſion; but being always perfectly ſubject to God, her *Will* was likewiſe perfectly ſubject

ject to her Reaſon: She no ſooner knew her Divine Creator by *Faith*, but her Will, inflamed with *Charity*, broke forth into Acts of Praiſe and Adoration of him: We may truly ſay, her Heart took Fire in an Inſtant; becauſe God's Grace found no Reſiſtance in it: And as God's Grace increaſed in her Soul without Intermiſſion, becauſe ſhe never ceaſed to co-operate with it; ſo all Virtues, and principally a moſt ardent Love of God, received proportionably their gradual Improvement, and went on increaſing, during the whole Courſe of her Life: Her Purity, both of Mind and Body, was perfectly Angelical: Her Conformity to the Will of God, and Obedience to all his holy Inſpirations, was equal to the Love ſhe had for him; and her Charity for her Neighbour, being kindled and continually nouriſhed by the ſame Fire of Divine Love, was inferior only to that which no Creature can attain to, and can be attributed to God alone: So that we may truly ſay, that tho' all Mankind be created to the Image and Likeneſs of God, the Soul of the *Bleſſed Virgin*, next to the ſacred Humanity of Chriſt, had the moſt perfect Reſemblance of him, and came up neareſt to the Divine Original, tho' ſtill infinitely inferior to it.

But

But tho' all theſe Virtues were poſſeſs'd by her in ſo eminent a Degree, it was her admirable *Humility* that gave them their greateſt Beauty and Luſtre: This was properly her favourite and diſtinguiſhing Virtue, which raiſed her above all others, and rendred her ſo highly acceptable to God: This was the Baſis and Foundation of all her Greatneſs; for ſhe was truly great in the Eyes of God, becauſe ſhe appeared as nothing in her own; that large Profuſion of the Divine Bounties on her never ſurpriſed her into the leaſt Thought of Vanity; becauſe the higher ſhe was exalted by God, the lower ſhe ſunk down into the Conſideration of her own Nothing; never aſſuming to herſelf the leaſt Part of the Glory that was due to God alone, but returning it all back to its proper Source: So that her Humility was not only the Nurſe and Guardian of all her other Virtues, but a perpetual Source of Gratitude, Adoration, Praiſe, and Thankſgiving to her bountiful Benefactor.

It was thus the *Bleſſed Virgin* was prepared and fitted by the Hands of God himſelf, for the high Dignity of being the Mother of the Redeemer of the World; and here She received a *fourth* extraordinary and ſingular Grace; I mean, her being overſhadowed by the Power and Virtue

tue of the Holy Ghoſt; and ſo remaining a pure Virgin, at the ſame Time that She became the true and natural Mother of God: By Virtue of which Grace or Privilege, She was alſo exempted from the Curſe laid upon *Eve*, and her whole Sex, of bringing forth in Pain; for as She conceived by the pure Virtue of the Divine Spirit, ſo She brought forth without the leaſt Violation of her Virginal Integrity; tho' her Humility was ſuch, that She choſe to paſs her whole Life-time for no other than an ordinary married Woman: And therefore, to leave the World in this mean Opinion of her, She paid an exact Obedience to the Law of *Moſes*, by ſubmitting herſelf to the Ceremony of being purified; which, in the Eyes of the World, ſuppoſed her having been defiled. But what is moſt ſtupendous, and ſurpaſſes all the Examples of Humility, that ever have been practiſed by any pure Creature; rather than reveal a Secret, the Diſcovery whereof would have been ſo glorious to her; ſhe ſuffer'd her Virtue to be ſuſpected by the Perſon the deareſt to her upon Earth; till God himſelf vindicated her Innocence, by revealing to St. *Joſeph* the whole Myſtery of the Incarnation, and the Part his Bleſſed Spouſe had in it.

I paſs

I paſs over the reſt of her Life, whereof thirty Years were ſpent in the bleſſed Company of *Jeſus*; and all paſs'd in an uninterrupted Practice of the ſublimeſt Virtues, and a continual Encreaſe of Grace and Merits; till God was pleaſed to crown them with the laſt ſingular Favour, I mean, that of her glorious Aſſumption into Heaven; where She is now ſeated, as I may ſay, neareſt to the Perſon of her dear Son; honoured by Angels and Saints as their Queen; and cheriſhed by God, anſwerably to the Love ſhe bore him, and the faithful Obedience ſhe paid him, during the whole Courſe of her Life: So that her Prerogative of Glory is now as ſingular, as were thoſe of Grace before her Diſſolution.

Now, is there not here Encouragement enough to pay a particular Devotion to the *Bleſſed Virgin*, and repoſe an entire Truſt and Confidence in her Interceſſion? Has She not all the Conditions requiſite to qualify her for the Office of an Interceſſor? Does She want either *Will* to aſk, or *Power* to obtain for us of Almighty God whatever Helps we ſtand in Need of? To doubt of her *Will* is to queſtion her *Charity*; which being a Virtue, that not only remains, but is improved and perfected in Heaven; we cannot doubt but her Zeal for the Good

of

of Souls is far greater now than when She was yet on Earth: Her Soul burnt then with Charity for her Neighbour, becauſe She loved God with her whole Heart; and ſince that Love is far more ardent now She ſees God Face to Face; it follows that her Charity for Mankind, and Zeal for the Salvation of Souls, is now alſo proportionably greater: And therefore the Church ſtiles her the *Mother of Mercy*; not only becauſe He, who is eſſentially *Goodneſs* and *Mercy*, is the ſacred Fruit of her Womb; but alſo becauſe She has the Tenderneſs and merciful Bowels of a Mother for us. She regards us all as her Children, becauſe by the Grace of Baptiſm, we are the *adoptive Sons* of God, and *Brothers* of *Jeſus Chriſt*. She loves the Juſt, becauſe they are conformable to the Image of her Son; and She compaſſionates Sinners, becauſe they are redeemed with his ſacred Blood: So that all may find a merciful Mother in her, and one ready to intereſt herſelf in their Behalf, and preſent their Petitions to the Giver of all good Gifts.

Therefore, we cannot queſtion her good Will to perform this charitable Office for us; much leſs can we doubt of her Power. Her Charity alone ſecures us of her Readineſs to intercede for us; but all her Virtues, by which ſhe was ſo eminently acceptable

ceptable to God, plead for the Efficacy of her Interceſſion. For if St. *James* exhorts us to pray for one another, *becauſe* (ſays he) *the aſſiduous Prayer of the Juſt avails very much*, v. 16. and that even in this Life, whilſt we are yet ſubject to many Failings; how powerful then and efficacious in our Behalf, muſt be the Interceſſion of a Perſon, who never offended God by the leaſt Thought, Word, or Deed, during the whole Courſe of her Life, and is now in the higheſt Degree of Favour in the Court of Heaven? Nay, may we not juſtly look upon all thoſe ſingular and extraordinary Graces, which God beſtow'd upon her in this Life, as ſo many aſſured Pledges, that he will refuſe her nothing, now She is Triumphant with him in Glory; where thoſe Virtues, which deſerved ſo high a Degree of Favour upon Earth, have now received their full Accompliſhment and Perfection; and, by conſequence, have render'd her ſtill more acceptable to him?

Suppoſe that in the Moment of her triumphant Entrance into Glory, (which, after the Aſcenſion of Chriſt, was the moſt ſolemn Feaſt, that ever was celebrated in the Court of Heaven;) ſuppoſe, I ſay, that in that Moment She had aſked Grace for any Sinner; can we think God would have denied her Requeſt? And, has She not the

ſame

ſame Intereſt and Power now, as She had then? Is She not in the ſame Degree of Favour, and will She not be ſo for all Eternity? For we muſt not fancy, as if Favour had it's Viciſſitudes in Heaven, as in this World. All Things are fix'd and permanent in the State of Bliſs. Rewards and Honours are diſtributed there according to every one's Holineſs and Merit: And therefore, as the *Bleſſed Virgin* will always ſurpaſs all Saints in Holineſs, ſo will She always be moſt acceptable to God, and have the greateſt Power with him. He will always honour her, as *Queen of Heaven*; and *Jeſus Chriſt* will always regard her as his *Mother*, and of all Creatures the deareſt to him. For which Reaſon, he has inſpired the Church to pay her extraordinary Honours, and conſecrate ſeveral Feſtival-Days in Memory of her; becauſe, he will have his Favours paſs, as it were, through her Hands; and render us ſenſible, that our Petitions will never be more effectual, than when we prevail with her to undertake the preſenting of them to Almighty God, through the *Mediation* of her dear Son. So that, the true and only Reaſon of our addreſſing ourſelves ſo often to her is, becauſe we have a greater Confidence in her Prayers than our own; and in ſo doing, we do but juſtice both to her and ourſelves.

For

For we are miſerable Sinners; and She is a moſt glorious Saint: We are defiled with many Crimes; and She is without Spot or Stain: We have deſerved God's Wrath, by ſo many repeated Infidelities towards him; and She has ever been his faithful Servant, and never offended him by the leaſt venial Sin: And is it not then juſt, we ſhould hope for a more favourable Acceptance of Prayers, preſented by the holy and unſpotted Hands of the immaculate Mother of God, than when we ourſelves preſent them to Almighty God?

We read, in Holy Scripture, that God commanded *Job*'s *Friends* to go to him, and deſire him to pray for them; becauſe God was angry with them, and would not have regarded their Prayers, unleſs *Job* had interceded for them. And ought not we then alſo, who in all Likelihood are upon no better Terms with Almighty God, than *Job*'s Friends were; ought we not, I ſay, to endeavour to make an Intereſt with ſome powerful Interceſſor, ſome ſelect Friend of God, ſuch as the *Bleſſed Virgin* is, to pray for us; leaſt our own Prayers ſhould be unacceptable to him? This certainly, is not only the moſt pious and moſt humble, but the moſt effectual Courſe we can take. For if, by a ſincere Devotion, and aſſiduous Application to her, we can

but

but render her our Patroneſs, and Advocate to her Son; there is nothing we may not hope for from his Mercy. We cannot put our eternal Intereſt into better Hands, than by engaging her to favour our Cauſe, who has the greateſt Power with him; from whom alone we muſt expect the Relief of all our Neceſſities in this Life, and a Share in his eternal Joys hereafter.

The LIVth ENTERTAINMENT.

The ſame Subject continued, and ſome Directions relating to it.

Hail, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Luke i. 28.

THERE is no Devotion ſo ſolid and well-grounded, but may be rendred fruitleſs by our own Fault. It will not therefore be improper, to give ſome Directions relating to the Devotion I have ſpoken of; which ſhall be the Subject of this Diſcourſe.

I have ſometimes read in Books, and heard in Sermons, that the true and ſolid Devotion to the *Bleſſed Virgin* conſiſts in the

the Imitation of her Virtues. I muſt own indeed, this is the perfecteſt, but I cannot think it to be the only Devotion to her: For if it be the only true one, they who are not yet Imitators of her Virtues, are utterly excluded from having any Part in the Practice of this Devotion: And yet, theſe are the Perſons, who ſtand moſt in need of being exhorted and encouraged to it: Becauſe, as they are further out of the Way of Salvation, they ſtand more in Need of a ſpecial Grace to bring them into it; and, by conſequence, of ſome powerful Advocate near the Throne of Grace, to plead their Cauſe, and intercede for them.

It is certainly for this Reaſon, that the *Bleſſed Virgin*, in the Litanies compoſed in Honour of her, is ſtiled, *The Refuge of Sinners:* And how will this Title be verified of her, if the Juſt alone be allowed to be in the Number of her Votaries? How will Sinners find a Refuge in her, if they are not to be encouraged to fly to her for Sanctuary, and put themſelves under her Protection? 'Tis true, they are not yet Imitators of her Virtues: But, muſt they deſpair of ever being ſo? Muſt they not deſire, and endeavour to become, what as yet they are not? Now 'tis by a conſtant Devotion to her, and daily imploring the Aſſiſtance of her Prayers, they muſt hope

to

to be at laſt admitted into that happy Number. For which Reaſon, inſtead of aſſerting, that our Devotion to the *Bleſſed Virgin* is to conſiſt in the Imitation of her Virtues; it ſeems to me more proper to ſay, that the Imitation of her Virtues is the Mark we ought to ſet before us, and the End we ought to aim at, in our whole Practice of Devotion to her: And therefore, we muſt make a large Difference between two Sorts of Sinners. The *firſt* is of thoſe, who not only are Sinners; but ſeem reſolved to continue ſo: At leaſt, uſe no ſerious Endeavours, nor diſcover any Deſire to be delivered from their ſinful State. The *ſecond* is of thoſe, who are Sinners indeed, and as yet ſubject to many Relapſes; yet are very ſenſible of their unhappy Condition, and deſire ſincerely to come out of it.

Now, as to the *firſt*, I have but little Encouragement to give them, notwithſtanding any pretended Devotion to the *Bleſſed Virgin*; till there appears a ſincere Deſire to correct their Lives, and ſome ſerious Efforts at leaſt, towards the putting it in Execution. For, if there be any ſo far miſled, as to imagine they ſhall be ſaved by the Interceſſion of the *Bleſſed Virgin*, without quitting their Habits of Sin, ſo they be but conſtant to certain Forms of Devotion to her; I muſt aſſure them their

Devotion

Devotion is no better than a Cheat; and will avail them juſt as much, as to ſay, *Lord, Lord!* without ever intending to keep his Commandments.

It is true, the *Bleſſed Virgin* is the *Refuge of Sinners*; but not the Encourager of Sin. She is a Sanctuary for thoſe, who with contrite and humble Hearts fly from God's Juſtice to his Mercy; but She pretends not to receive under her Protection, profeſſed and incorrigible Rebels. *Finally*, She refuſes not to be the Advocate of thoſe, who terrify'd with the Number and Enormity of their Sins, implore her Interceſſion; provided they diſpoſe themſelves to deſerve this Favour, by aiming at a ſerious Change of Life; to which End, all their Prayers and Devotions to her muſt be directed: And ſince this appears to be the Diſpoſition of the ſecond Sort of Sinners, mentioned by me; I cannot ſay enough to encourage them to continue their Devotions to her; and hope well of the Succeſs: For, whatever their Sins may be, ſince they have a ſincere Deſire, and Intention to quit them, this Diſpoſition cannot but come from God; and a conſtant Practice of ſuch Devotions as are approved of, and recommended by the Church, cannot but be a powerful Means to improve it by Degrees, and bring it at laſt to the Perfection they aim

aim at; which they muſt always keep in View, that they may be always advancing towards it: So that although they begin their Devotions to the *Bleſſed Virgin*, in a State very unconformable to her Holineſs and Purity; they may hope, by the Continuance of them, to be transformed into new Creatures; and in the End, become conformable to her, in the Imitation of her Virtues.

This therefore, is the great Rule of all Sorts of Devotions; whether to the *Bleſſed Virgin*, or any other Saint: *viz.* Whatever Devotion is conducing to the Amendment of our Lives, and directed to that End, cannot but be ſolid, and acceptable to God. But if, on the contrary, any Devotion be, through Abuſe, made an Encouragement to continue in Sin, it ought to be regarded as a Deluſion, or Stratagem of the Devil. And therefore, if there be any (as I can ſcarce think there are) who promiſe Salvation to Chriſtians, for the bare Practice of certain external Forms of Devotion, though they ſhould run on in their Habits of Sin, to their very laſt Sickneſs; this is not the Doctrine of the Church, but deteſted by her: Which therefore ought not to hinder the Faithful from practiſing any Form of Devotion, not diſapproved by the Church; becauſe they may profit by

what is really good in it; if they be punctual in performing all the Rules of it, and depend no farther upon it, than as it is a Means to obtain God's Grace, to reſiſt Sin, and advance in Virtue: For 'tis moſt certain, that as far as any Devotion contributes to this End, and has an Influence upon the leading a good Life; ſo far it is to be recommended: And juſt ſo far, and no farther, a Hope of Salvation may be built upon the Practice of it.

I will now ſpeak briefly of the Devotions, againſt which no Exception can be made. The *firſt* is, never to begin, or end the Day, without putting ourſelves under the Protection of the *Bleſſed Virgin*; by ſaying ſome ſhort Prayer, in Honour of her: For we muſt all-regard her as our Mother in *Jeſus Chriſt*; and therefore, as Children, aſk Bleſſing of their Parents regularly twice a Day; ſo muſt we make it our conſtant Practice, not to let the Morning or Evening paſs, without having firſt obtain'd a Bleſſing of her. The angelical Salutation, the Office and Litanies compoſed in Honour of her, are to be preferr'd before all other vocal Devotions; as being of the greateſt Authority, and recommended by the univerſal Practice of the Church.

The *ſecond* is a devout Obſervance of the Feaſts ordained, in Honour of her.

Theſe

Theſe are all ſolemn Days in the Church, and to be kept with a Devotion anſwerable to the Intention of their Inſtitution. All thoſe then that have a Zeal for her Honour, and aſpire to be in the Number of her true Servants, muſt be eager to teſtify it on thoſe Days, and diſtinguiſh themſelves by a more than ordinary Piety; and particularly, by a worthy Frequentation of the Holy Sacraments. For as thoſe, who ſeek to inſinuate themſelves into the Favour of any Prince; beſides their making their daily Court, take Care to appear before him on certain ſolemn Days, in rich new Cloaths; ſo, if we will gain the Favour of the Queen of Heaven, beſides our daily Devotions, we muſt not fail to make our Court on her Feſtival Days; by giving the ſame Marks, in a ſpiritual Manner, of our Zeal and Reſpect for her. Our old Cloaths therefore, that is, our old Habits of Sin, will ſuit very ill with the Solemnity of thoſe Days: *The old Man muſt be put off, with his Acts, and the new Man put on; who is created according to God in Juſtice and Holineſs*; that ſo we may appear at the publick Service of the Church, *renew'd in the Spirit of the Mind*, as St. *Paul* ſpeaks; that is, adorned in Soul, with ſanctifying Grace: And ſo her Feaſts will both be kept Holy by us,

and we ourſelves ſhall be made holy by the keeping of them.

The third and laſt Devotion I ſhall ſpeak of, is that of the *Roſary* or *Beads:* which, whether we conſider the Prayers whereof it is compoſed, or the Method to be obſerved in the ſaying of them, will appear not only profitable but admirable in its Inſtitution: Since by Means of it, if performed methodically and with Attention, the Mind is weekly carried through all the principal Myſteries of Man's Redemption; and has an Opportunity of making as often an Acknowledgement to Chriſt for all he has done and ſuffer'd for us: But there is alſo this peculiar Advantage in it, that it is a Devotion ſuited to all Capacities and States: For a Traveller may perform it on the Road, a Labourer at his Work, a Tradeſman in his Shop; a Gentleman in his Walks of Pleaſure, and a Sick Man confined to his Bed; and even the moſt Ignorant are as fully qualified for the Performance of it, as the moſt learned Divine.

If it be objected, that repeating the ſame Prayer ſo often over is tedious, and apt to cauſe Coldneſs and Diſtraction in the Mind, which ſtands in Need of Variety, to keep it awake and attentive: I anſwer, that the Coldneſs or Diſtraction occaſion'd by repeating the ſame Prayer often over, is either voluntary,

tary, or involuntary: If voluntary, then 'tis our own Fault; and we have it in our Power to correct it: If involuntary, then there is no Fault at all, nor Harm done; for our Prayers will nevertheleſs have their full Effect: However, it is much to be fear'd, that this Coldneſs, Diſtraction, and Tedioufneſs, in repeating the ſame Prayer often over, proceeds moſtly from our not being ſufficiently ſenſible of our Neceſſities and Wants. Do we not ſee Beggars in the Streets, repeating the ſame Requeſt to all that paſs by, over and over again, from Morning till Night? For they ſtudy no Variety: And yet, this Repetition of the ſame Form of Words hinders not, but that they are very intent upon the Buſineſs they are about; becauſe being heartily ſenſible of their neceſſitous Condition, they are never weary of deſiring and aſking a Relief: In the ſame Manner therefore, if we had as deep a Senſe of the Neceſſities of our Souls, and as eager a Deſire to receive a conſtant Relief from Heaven, as Beggars have to receive an Alms; we ſhould have no Difficulty to aſk it fifty Times over, with the ſame Attention as once; nor ever grow weary of Soliciting, tho' in the ſame Form of Words, to obtain that which we never ceaſe to want.

But they, who are Enemies to the Beads, tell us, that in ſaying them, we pray ten

Times more to the *Bleſſed Virgin* than to Almighty God: But this is a groſs Miſtake; as I will demonſtrate by a clear Example.

If I ſhould put a Requeſt into the Hands of any Perſon, and deſire him to preſent it for me to the King; I aſk, whether my chief Requeſt be to him, whom I employ to preſent it, or to the King to whom it is to be deliver'd? the Queſtion anſwers itſelf. In like Manner therefore, when we pray thus; *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now, and in the Hour of our Death,* and repeat this ten Times over; 'tis plain, that all we beg of the *Bleſſed Virgin,* is to preſent our Requeſts to Almighty God: So that, altho' we addreſs ourſelves immediately to her, our Prayers are not only chiefly to God, but, to ſpeak properly, to God alone; as the Requeſt, I have ſpoken of, is made to the King alone, tho' another be deſir'd to deliver it to him; and in Effect, we pray no otherwiſe to the *Bleſſed Virgin,* than we pray to one another, when we recommend ourſelves to one another's Prayers.

It is true, we call it *Praying to the Bleſſed Virgin,* and *Praying to the Saints,* when we implore the Aſſiſtance of their Prayers; becauſe Cuſtom, which is wholly arbitrary, has made it the common Way of ſpeaking, to call it ſo: And if it were the Cuſtom to call it *Praying to one another,* when we

deſire

deſire one another's Prayers, the Expreſſion would be full as proper; and yet the Thing would be the ſame it is now: So that call it what you pleaſe, either *Praying to the Bleſſed Virgin*, or *Praying the Bleſſed Virgin*, the Meaning is no other, than that we deſire her to pray with us, and for us; to join her Prayers with ours; to be a Fellow-petitioner with us; and, in a Word, to preſent our Petitions to God, to render them more acceptable to him.

Which alſo fully anſwers the common frivolous Objection; *viz.* that *we are all commanded to come to Chriſt:* For if this Text forbids our deſiring the *Bleſſed Virgin* to pray for us, it likewiſe forbids our deſiring one another's Prayers; which is abſurd. I anſwer therefore, that by deſiring the *Bleſſed Virgin* to pray with us, and for us, to *Chriſt*, we not only come to him ourſelves, but we alſo engage his *Bleſſed Mother* to come with us; ſince 'tis plain, whatever Form of Words we uſe to implore her Interceſſion, 'tis plain, I ſay, that all our Heart's Deſires are directed to God; that our Confidence of obtaining Grace and Salvation is wholly in God; that all our Expectation is from God through *Jeſus Chriſt:* Finally, that we deſire no more of the *Bleſſed Virgin*, than we daily deſire of one another, *viz.* the Aſſiſtance of her Prayers.

Now ſuppoſe we do this fifty Times a Day, by repeating ſo often the Angelical Salutation (which we call, Saying a Pair of Beads,) ſuppoſe, I ſay, we do this fifty Times a Day, or oftner, is it not ſo much the better? For ſince, to deſire the Prayers of others is a Mark of Humility, and a tacit Acknowledgment that we have a greater Opinion of their Virtue than our own; 'tis ſtill a Mark of a greater Humility, to repeat this Requeſt often; and therefore if it be good to ſay once, *Holy Mary, pray for us*; there can be no Exception made againſt the frequent Repetition of it. This I am ſure of, that to deny the Lawfulneſs of deſiring a Share in the *Bleſſed Virgin*'s Prayers, and at the ſame Time to allow the Lawfulneſs of deſiring Sinners upon Earth to pray for us, is a manifeſt Contradiction to common Senſe.

We are therefore bound to bleſs God for not having been brought up in an Error, which would deprive us of the Benefit of having ſo glorious a Saint in Heaven, to intercede for us. For whether we conſider the eminent Graces which God has ſo liberally beſtow'd upon her, or the exact Fidelity, with which She correſponded to all his Graces; we cannot but regard Her as a Perſon ſo acceptable to God, that he will refuſe her nothing She ſhall aſk of him for

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the Good of our Souls. Then again, when we conſider that She has carried him, who is *Goodneſs* and *Mercy* itſelf, for nine Months together in her Womb; and that She always carried him in her Heart, as the ſole Object of her Love; we cannot but conclude, thatShe herſelf has received, in all that Time, ſo ample a Portion of thoſe Virtues; that it is to do her the greateſt Injuſtice, not to regard her as a moſt merciful and tender Mother to all thoſe, who ſtand in Need of, and cry out to her for her Aſſiſtance.

Theſe then are the Grounds upon which our Devotion to the *Bleſſed Virgin* is built; theſe the Reaſons why we ſo often importune her to pray for us. If they who blame us for it, either think her not charitable enough to intereſt herſelf in our behalf; or not powerful enough to obtain any Thing for us; or perhaps think themſelves to have as good an Intereſt with *Chriſt*, as his *Bleſſed Mother*; let us, at leaſt, be far from entertaining either ſo mean an Opinion of her, or ſo proud an one of ourſelves: Let us acknowledge her to be the *Mother of Mercy*; and, of all Creatures, the moſt acceptable to God: Let us alſo own the Unworthineſs of our own Prayers: And therefore ſince, on the one Hand, we have no Hopes of Salvation but from the pure Goodneſs of

God, through the Mediation of *Jeſus Chriſt*; and are ſenſible, on the other, that by the Multitude and Grievouſneſs of our Sins, we have deſerved to be rejected by him; let us never ceaſe to importune the *Bleſſed Mother of God* to intercede for us, that we may find Mercy at his Hands; nor ever paſs a Day without offering to her, from Time to Time, this ſhort but excellent Prayer: *Holy* Mary, *Mother of God*; *pray for us Sinners, now, and in the Hour of our Death.* Amen.

The LVth Entertainment.

The Parable of the Seed.

The Sower went out to ſow his Seed.
Luke viii. 5.

THE Parable I am going to explain is thus propoſed by Chriſt; *The Sower went out to ſow his Seed; and as he ſowed, ſome fell by the* Way's Side; *and it was trodden down, and the Fowls of the Air devoured it: And ſome fell upon a* Rock; *and as ſoon as it was ſprung up, it wither'd away, becauſe it lacked Moiſture: And*

And ſome fell among Thorns; *and the Thorns ſprang up with it, and choked it: And other fell on* good Ground, *and ſprang up, and bare Fruit an Hundred-fold.*

This is the Parable; and the principal Drift of it is to mark out three ſeveral Cauſes, by which the *Seed* of the *Word of God*, as Chriſt himſelf explains it, is render'd fruitleſs; that is, three ſeveral Obſtacles to Salvation; repreſented under the Figure of the Seed's falling, *by the Way's Side*, upon a *Rock*, and amongſt *Thorns*. The *firſt* is thus ſet forth by Chriſt; *Some of the Seed fell by the Way's Side, and it was trodden down, and the Fowls of the Air devoured it:* Which he explains thus; *They who are by the Way's Side, are thoſe who hear the Word; then comes the Devil, and takes it out of their Hearts, leſt believing they ſhould be ſaved.*

Here we have the Character of *Obdurate Sinners*, and the Power the *Devil* has over them, ſet forth in lively Colours: Chriſt compares them to that Ground which lies near the High-way, and is uſually trod hard into a Path, by the Number of Paſſengers that walk upon it: Now, whatever Seed falls upon this Ground, is certainly loſt; *Firſt*, Becauſe, by Reaſon of its Hardneſs, it cannot ſo much as enter into the Earth, much leſs be covered deep enough

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to take Root; and, *ſecondly*, Becauſe it is either trodden upon, or eaten up by the *Fowls of the Air:* In the ſame Manner, the Seed of the Divine Word is loſt upon the Hearts of *obdurate Sinners:* It falls indeed upon them; for *they hear the Word*, as Chriſt ſays; and this renders them inexcuſable before God, becauſe, hearing it, they give no Attention to it; but are of the Number of thoſe who ſay to God in their Hearts, *We will not have the Knowledge of thy Ways:* However, the *Father of Mercies* ceaſes not to ſpeak to them by his holy Inſpirations; and they have Reflection enough to perceive them, and know them to be the Voice of God that calls upon them: But they refuſe to entertain them; they will not let them enter into their Hearts, for fear they ſhould faſten upon them, and diſturb them in their criminal Pleaſures.

This is their unhappy Diſpoſition; and tho' it be, of its own Nature, Obſtacle enough to the Grace that ſpeaks interiorly to them; yet Chriſt attributes it chiefly to the Power the *Devil* has over them, who is watchful to nouriſh this Diſpoſition, and harden them in it: *They hear the Word*, ſays Chriſt; *then comes the Devil, and takes it out of their Hearts:* He is jealous of his Prey, and will not truſt them

them wholly to themſelves; but keeps aſſiduous about them, to hinder the Seed of God's Word from working any good Effect upon their Souls: And therefore, as ſoon as any good Thought, or Truth relating to their eternal Intereſt, preſents itſelf to their Minds, the Devil is ready to ſnatch it immediately from their Hearts; *leſt, believing, they ſhould be ſaved,* or leſt by ruminating upon it, and giving it Time to make an Impreſſion, they ſhould think ſeriouſly of a Change, and break looſe from the Chains that keep them in Bondage.

But ſince it is to be hoped, there are not many in this abandon'd and reprobate State; the whole Subject of this Entertainment ſhall be ſome Directions, relating to the two other Obſtacles to Salvation, which are far more common; marked out in the Parable.

The *ſecond* Hindrance to Salvation, or Cauſe which renders the *Seed* of *God's Word* fruitleſs, is thus characterized by Chriſt; *And ſome fell upon a Rock, and growing up it wither'd, becauſe it wanted Moiſture.* By the Word *Rock* is underſtood a *rocky* or *ſtony Ground*; for if Seed were ſown upon a *bare Rock*, it would lie naked upon the Surface of it, and it were impoſſible it ſhould *grow up* at all: And there-

therefore St. *Matthew*, Chap. xiii. Ver. 5. delivers this Part of the ſame Parable in theſe Terms; *Some Part of the Seed fell upon ſtony Places, where it had not much Earth; and forthwith it ſprang up, becauſe it had no Deepneſs of Earth:* For Seed, which is but thinly covered with Earth, ſhoots up much ſooner than that which falls deep into the Ground: But as it has a quicker Growth, ſo it alſo dies ſooner; becauſe it has not Moiſture enough to nouriſh the green Corn, which is ſoon dried up with the Heat of the Sun.

This is the ſecond Part of the Parable; and our Saviour explains it in the following Manner; *They who are ſown upon a Rock, are thoſe who, when they have heard the Word, receive it with Joy: And theſe have no Root; they believe for a Time, and go back in Time of Temptation.* You ſee here a manifeſt Difference between this Character and the former: For thoſe of the former Character only *hear the Word*, but *receive it not*; becauſe they are *hard*, and *the Devil comes and takes it immediately out of their Hearts:* But theſe not only *hear the Word*, but *receive* it; nay, *receive it with Joy:* It makes an Impreſſion upon them; they lament their Sins many Times with Tears, as St. *Gregory* obſerves: But what is the Fruit of it? Alas! *they have*

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no Root: It ſhoots up immediately, and withers ſoon after; producing nothing but barren Deſires, and Purpoſes without Effect: All their Fervour is no more than a ſudden Flaſh, that vaniſhes in a Moment: It is but a tranſient Fit of Devotion, which paſſes almoſt as ſoon as it is kindled; and their Tears are like thoſe of Children; ſoon excited, and dried up as ſoon with the Temptation of ſome pleaſing Trifle that is offered to their Fancy.

Finally, as ſoft Bodies are the moſt eaſily ſuſceptible of Impreſſions, but loſe them with the ſame Eaſe as they receive them; ſo the Perſons deſcribed in this ſecond Character, having no Solidity, that is, no Steadineſs in their Hearts; tho' they *receive the Word with Joy*, and are tenderly affected with it for a Time, yet they are as ready to part with it, as they were to receive it: So that, upon the firſt Difficulty they meet with, or Temptation that aſſaults them, all the Fruit that might have been expected from thoſe ſenſible Impreſſions miſcarries; their good Purpoſes are forgot; and they return to their cuſtomary Weakneſs, in the ſame Manner as if they never had been made at all: And ſo their Lives paſs in a continual Circle of Riſing and Falling; of making good Reſolutions one Day, and breaking them the next;

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of projecting many Things, and going through with nothing.

Hence it appears plainly, that the *ſecond* Cauſe of ſpiritual Barrenneſs, marked out in this Parable, is properly the Vice of *Inconſtancy*; which, tho' it be not ſo bad as *Hardneſs of Heart*, is notwithſtanding, an abſolute Obſtacle to Salvation: For unleſs this Evil be effectually remedied, and the Soul fixed upon ſuch ſolid Principles, as to render her firm and ſteady in the Duties of a Chriſtian Life, 'tis impoſſible the great Work of Salvation ſhould ever be accompliſh'd; nay, our very beſt Reſolutions will prove abortive, and the moſt religious Deſigns come to nothing.

We muſt therefore ſearch into the Root of this Diſtemper, and then conſider what is proper for its Cure: Now ſome attribute it to a natural Levity, or Fickleneſs of Temper: But this being only a Defect or Weakneſs of Nature, Perſons may be ſubject to it in trivial or indifferent Matters, and yet be very firm and ſteady in all Duties God requires of them: Becauſe if the Law of God, and Principles of Faith, be their Rule; as that is fixed and unchangeable, their Practice guided by it will be ſo too: Others therefore aſcribe it to a Want of *Faith:* But tho' *Conſtancy* cannot be without Faith, yet *Faith* may be without Con-

Conſtancy; becauſe a Foundation may be laid, and no Superſtructure raiſed upon it. It is true, if all Believers were like St. *Paul*'s Juſt Man, who *lives by Faith*, then all who had this Virtue would likewiſe have a ſufficient Degree of Chriſtian Conſtancy, to carry them ſteadily on through all the Difficulties and neceſſary Trials of Virtue: But the Caſe is quite otherwiſe; for many Chriſtians are found in Faith, but very corrupt in their Manners: And 'tis for this Reaſon, that as their Sins are more enormous than thoſe of Infidels, who never had the Light of Faith, ſo will their Puniſhment be alſo more ſevere; becauſe, having been illuminated from above, they have not followed the Light God has beſtowed upon them, nor conformed their Lives to the Faith they profeſſed. Faith therefore is not properly wanting to them, but they are wanting to their Faith: They believe like Chriſtians, but act as Unbelievers; in permitting every Temptation to divert them from the Purſuit of Virtue, and put them out of the Way of Salvation.

But what then is the Cauſe of this extraordinary Weakneſs, in the important Concerns of Eternity; which, if Men were guilty of it in temporal Matters of any Conſequence, would expoſe them to Contempt and Laughter? I anſwer, that

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the true Root of their Inconſtancy, is no other than ſome predominant Paſſion, or Habit, which inclines them ſtrongly to what is forbid, and gives them a violent Repugnance to what is commanded. The Reaſon hereof is clear; becauſe, whoever is not poſſeſs'd with any Paſſion, which inclines him ſtrongly to Evil, and gives him an Averſion to his Duty; will have no great Difficulty to avoid the one, and perform the other. Now, 'tis not probable, that a Perſon who is not wholly loſt to Principles of Conſcience and Religion, will be guilty of frequent Treſpaſſes, either in doing what he is bound to avoid, or omitting what he is bound to do; if obeying the Law of God, and performing his Duty, be not very painful to him. When therefore, his Tranſgreſſions are very frequent, notwithſtanding his re-iterated Purpoſes to the contrary, 'tis an evident Mark that the Difficulty of obeying is very great. And what can be the Root of this Difficulty or Repugnance, but ſome Paſſion; which not finding its Account in the Performance of his Duty, is importunate and preſſing to be gratified, even in Contradiction to the Law of God?

It is true indeed, as long as any Paſſion lies dormant, as it often does; the making of good Purpoſes, and forming Deſigns of Amend-

Amendment, coſts nothing. But when this Calm is over, and the Paſſion, awakened by ſome violent Temptation, begins again to grow importunate and craving for a Compliance; then the Perſon, who before thought he ſhould do every thing, and made the beſt Purpoſes in the World, does juſt nothing at all; but yields tamely to its Importunity; and is again, as much, if not more a Slave to it, than he was before. For how ſhould a Perſon ever go on ſteady in the Way of Virtue, as long as he has a ſtrong Weight or Biaſs upon his Heart; which is continually drawing him another Way? Now every Paſſion is as a Weight or Biaſs upon the Heart; which draws and preſſes it towards its proper Object: And though the Party that labours under it may make ſome weak Efforts, from Time to Time, to reſiſt its Violence; as long as that Paſſion keeps its hold, his Struggling will be but like the languid and drowſy Endeavours of a Perſon overwhelm'd with Sleep; who ſcarce raiſes himſelf up, but drops down again.

This therefore is the general Root of that Changeableneſs and Inconſtancy of Mind; by which Sinners are ſo often diverted from executing the beſt Reſolutions they make for their eternal Good. This is properly that *Rock*, or *ſtrong Ground*, which hinders

ders the *Seed* of *God's Word*, from entring deep into their Hearts, and becoming fruitful in good Works; and whilſt this *Rock* ſubſiſts, no Good can be expected of them. They may *receive the Word with Joy*; they may be tenderly affected with it, and ſhew a Willingneſs to obey it; nay, form Deſigns in their Minds, to undertake, and carry on effectually the Work of their eternal Salvation; but till that Paſſion be baniſh'd from their Hearts, the Seed of the Divine Word can take no Root; all their good Purpoſes will be blaſted; all their Deſigns miſcarry; their very beſt Inclinations will remain fruitleſs; and they will ever remain the ſame fickle and inconſtant Creatures; ever falſe to themſelves, and to God; ever promiſing, and never performing; ever beginning, and never finiſhing any Thing they are about.

This, I ſay, will be their Condition, as long as they are over-ruled by any Paſſion: And therefore, the only effectual Remedy of their Inconſtancy, is to deſtroy that Paſſion, which is the Root of it. But how muſt that be done? For here lies the Difficulty: It is certain, in the *firſt* Place, that their chief Truſt and Confidence muſt be in God; if this Principle be not deeply fixed in their Hearts, all their Endeavours will be vain. *Secondly*, It is no leſs certain, that

that notwithſtanding their entire Truſt and Confidence in God, they muſt labour no leſs heartily themſelves, than if the whole Succeſs depended upon their own Induſtry and Application. And *thirdly*, It is evident, from Experience, that no Paſſion can be ſubdued; unleſs it be ſtarved out, and every thing removed from it, that gives Strength and Nouriſhment to it. Theſe three Principles joined together, will put them into the Method eſtabliſhed by Providence; and oblige them to make uſe of all the general and particular Remedies their Condition ſtands in need of.

The general ones, in conſequence to the Principles eſtabliſhed, are humble and fervent Prayer; a daily Examination of Conſcience; the Uſe of the Sacraments; keeping out of Idleneſs; and avoiding the uſual Occaſions of Relapſes: Theſe are all excellent Means, to weaken by Degrees, any Inclination or Paſſion, tho' never ſo perverſe and obſtinate in its Nature; provided, they be performed with ſuch a ſerious Application, as gives Grounds to judge, that the Parties concerned are in earneſt: For, if in performing the Duties of Prayer, and other Devotions mentioned, they ſeldom go beyond the outward Form; 'tis all Children's Play; and no more than a mock Fight, or ſhooting at the Enemy

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with Powder, which makes a Noiſe, but does no Execution: And therefore, 'tis no Wonder, if theſe Preſcriptions prove often ineffectual: The Fault lies not in the Remedies, but in the Perſons; who content themſelves with the outward Form, but neglect the inward Diſpoſitions, with which they are to be made uſe of.

As to particular Remedies, the Parties concern'd muſt be, in a great Meaſure, their own Phyſicians, and preſcribe to themſelves: Becauſe, ſince no Man can underſtand the particular Nature of their prevailing Paſſion, ſo well as themſelves; it follows, that they themſelves, if they will but proceed ſincerely, are the beſt Judges of what is moſt proper to be applied to it. Experience has taught them the ſecret Springs, by which it moves; the Objects that inflame it; the firſt Symptoms of an approaching Temptation; the Degrees by which it works upon the Imagination; the remote, and immediate Occaſions of Relapſes; and how the immediate ones are uſher'd in by thoſe that are more remote. The experimental Knowledge they have of all theſe Things, will be their beſt Guide to direct them what to do, and what to avoid, in many particular Caſes; in which their Confeſſors can do no more, than to give them general Rules; that they muſt be

be watchful to reſiſt, the very firſt Beginnings of Temptations; and keep at the greateſt Diſtance poſſible, from every thing that contributes to inflame, or nouriſh the Diſtemper: For though many of theſe, may be innocent in themſelves, at leaſt not directly ſinful; yet they are always leading to Sin, in reſpect of the Perſons I ſpeak of; who, if they be not careful to avoid them when they have it in their Power, will often find themſelves drawn into the Snare, before they are aware of it; becauſe the remote Occaſions, will inſenſibly draw on the immediate ones; and then the Temptation will prevail, and all the good Purpoſes they have made will ſignify nothing.

I will now ſpeak briefly, of the *third* and laſt Cauſe of ſpiritual Barrenneſs; or Obſtacle to Salvation, mark'd out in the following Words; *And ſome fell among Thorns, and the Thorns growing up, together with the Corn, choked it.* Which is thus expounded by Chriſt: *But that which fell among Thorns, are they who have heard the Word; but with the Solicitudes, the Riches and Pleaſures of Life going, are choked, and bring forth no Fruit.* The Word *going*, imports the ſame as, *by Degrees*; or *in Proceſs of Time*: Becauſe, the Thorns that grow up with Corn, choke it, not all

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at once, but gradually: And when our Saviour ſays, that the Perſons mark'd out in this Part of the Parable, *are they who hear the Word*; we muſt add to it, according to a learned Interpreter, *and receive it*; nay, receive it in ſuch a Manner, that it even takes deep Root in their Hearts; and would grow up to its full Ripeneſs, were it not choked by the *Thorns* that *grow up with it*. For Corn is in no Danger of being ſpoil'd by Weeds, 'till it be conſiderably grown up: So that the Perſons repreſented in this Character, approach ſtill ſome Degrees nearer than the former; to the happy State of thoſe, who are ſignified by the *good Ground*, which *brings forth an Hundred-fold*. For the *Word* is both heard and received by them; it enters into their Hearts, it takes Root, it grows up to a conſiderable Height; and yet, for Want of ſome Pains and Care, to pluck up the Thorns that grow up with it; 'tis choked by Degrees, and brings forth no Fruit. *Going, they are choked.*

But what are the *Thorns*, which choke the growing Corn? St. *Luke* mentions three; the *Solicitudes*, the *Riches*, and *Pleaſures* of Life: But St. *Matthew* reduces them to two, *Solicitudes* and *Riches*: Becauſe *Riches*, conſidered as an Obſtacle to Salvation,

tion, include *Pleaſures*; as being the Means, by which they are procured.

For Riches would not hinder Salvation, but rather facilitate and promote it; were they not abuſed by their Poſſeſſors in being made inſtrumental to thoſe Pleaſures, which draw their Hearts from God, and link them inſenſibly to this World: The ſame is to be ſaid of the *Solicitudes* of this Life: They are *Thorns* to the Soul, when they engage the Heart ſo wholly in their Intereſt, as to take it off from the Concerns of a better Life: For then, tho' the Seeds of Piety and Virtue were once deeply laid, they are ſtifled in the Croud and Hurry of temporal Affairs, and in the End *bring forth no Fruit.*

This is the Moral of this Part of the Parable; and it ſets forth in lively Colours the Character of thoſe unfortunate Chriſtians; who, after a virtuous Education, and conſiderable Progreſs in the Way of everlaſting Happineſs, entring into the World, are by Degrees corrupted by it. *Going, they are choked*; either by being engaged in a Multitude of Affairs, which encumber them with *Solicitudes*, and leave no Room for the Concerns of their Souls; or by giving themſelves over to it's *Pleaſures*, which gain Ground inſenſibly upon their Affections, and exclude the Love of God, by the

ſame Degrees as they introduce that of the World. So that *Solicitudes* and *Pleaſures*, tho' Things of a different Nature, agree in being equally, by their Exceſs, an Obſtacle to the Growth of Virtue. The *Solicitudes* of the World fill the Heart, and it's *Pleaſures* corrupt it; and both the one and the other infuſe a worldly Spirit, inconſiſtent with the Spirit of God. The Misfortune of thoſe, who are loſt by an Exceſs of *Solicitude*, is moſtly occaſion'd by their having too much Buſineſs; and the Ruin of thoſe, who are corrupted with Pleaſures, is moſtly owing to their having no Buſineſs at all: Tho' both Parties might find a middle Way to ſteer their Courſe in, between theſe two Rocks, without ſpliting upon either: For, as to your Men of Buſineſs; if Avarice or Ambition were not conſulted, a great Part of that Buſineſs, which over-charges Men with Solicitude, and makes them forget Almighty God, might be retrench'd; and then they would find Time enough for the Performance of ſuch Chriſtian Duties, as would be a Means, not only to preſerve the Love of God in their Hearts; but to ſanctify even their temporal Employments, and conſecrate all that to God, which is uſually ſacrificed to Covetouſneſs and Pride.

But as to thoſe, who, under Pretence of having no Buſineſs at all, run into the oppoſite

poſite Exceſs of Divertiſements and Pleaſures, to murder Time, which would otherwiſe lie heavy upon their Hands; theſe Perſons cannot deny at leaſt, but that they have one neceſſary and indiſpenſable Buſineſs to do, which is, the Saving of their Souls; and the more Time and Leiſure they have for it, the more inexcuſable they are if they neglect it. What reaſonable Pretence can hinder them from aſſiſting daily at the *Holy Sacrifice*, when they have the Opportunity to do it? What can hinder them from ſaying daily the ſhort Office of our Bleſſed *Lady*, and the penitential *Pſalms*, with the long Litanies; and ſpending one half Hour at leaſt in ſpiritual Reading, beſides a ſhort half Hour alloted for their Evening Prayers? Theſe Duties, conſtantly perform'd, will daily cut off between two or three Hours from Idleneſs; and diſcharge them of a Part of that Time, which is a Burden to them. If the Preſcription appears diſagreeable, it is a Sign their Souls are very much indiſpoſed, and ſtand highly in need of it.

However, ſince notwithſtanding all this, there will ſtill remain many vacant Hours, and but too many indeed, to be wholly thrown away upon Pleaſure; Means may be found to prevent this Loſs, in ſuch a Manner as cannot be ſaid to be inconſiſtent

with a Chriſtian Life: For, tho' the Perſons here chiefly ſpoken of, be not, as I ſuppoſe, under a Neceſſity of ſeeking any lucrative Employment, to gain a Livelihood; yet I can ſee no Reaſon to excuſe them from an Obligation of applying themſelves to ſomething that is ſerious, either for their own Improvement, or the Service of their Neighbour. Has Almighty God given them no Talent, of which he will demand an Account at the laſt Day? As to the Ladies, they are uſually brought up to ſome Work, ſuitable to their Condition; in which they may employ their vacant Hours, in a very Chriſtian Manner. And as to the Gentlemen (tho' many of them have no particular Calling, which however, is a very great Misfortune,) I preſume at leaſt they are not wholly uncapable of ſome ſerious Buſineſs: For I ſuppoſe they can, at leaſt, read and write; and how much Time may be profitably ſpent this way, if not for others, at leaſt for themſelves? They may likewiſe amuſe themſelves with ſome Handy-craft or mechanical Employment; as many Perſons of Quality do, for no other End, than to keep themſelves out of Idleneſs, or ſuch Parties of Pleaſure as ſeldom keep within the Bounds of what is innocent, even when they are not abſolutely *ſinful in* themſelves.

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If they ſay, they are not of an Humour to ſet themſelves to any ſerious Employment; they may as well ſay, they are not of an Humour to live like Chriſtians: They are not of an Humour to do Penance for their Sins: Infine, they are not of an Humour to ſave their Souls. For that is the plain Engliſh of it: Since it is certain, that as long as their Hearts and Affections are running mad after the Pleaſures of this World, they will not only, never be of an Humour to do any thing that is ſerious; but the Commandments themſelves, and all the moſt eſſential Duties of a Chriſtian Life, will at laſt be ſacrificed to Sloth and Pleaſure.

But it is now Time to end. And ſince great Numbers are concern'd in this latter Part of the Parable; I mean all thoſe, who are either too buſy, or too idle, to apply themſelves to the Concerns of their Souls; the beſt Advice I can give them is to conſider ſeriouſly, that Time is ſhort; that there is an Eternity to come; that Heaven is not to be obtain'd, but by the Practice of ſuch Means as Chriſt has preſcribed; that the *Solicitudes*, and *Pleaſures* of Life, if not moderated by a Chriſtian Prudence, are declared by him, to be Obſtacles to Salvation: Finally, that every thing is to be look'd upon as Vanity and Folly, which, tho'

pleaſing for the preſent to our Inclinations, puts us in Danger of periſhing eternally.

The LVIth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Sin of Concealment in Confeſſion.

Jeſus was caſting out a Devil, and it was dumb. Luke xi. 14.

THE Perſon, out of whom Chriſt caſt the *Dumb Devil*, here ſpoken of, was only poſſeſs'd in Body: But there are but too many in the World poſſeſs'd in Soul, by the ſame Evil Spirit. Among theſe we may reckon all ſuch, as out of Sloth or Shame, defer from Time to Time to have Recourſe to the Sacrament of Penance: The Neglect whereof affords their Enemy Opportunity to fortify himſelf ſo ſtrongly in their Souls, that it becomes very difficult to diſlodge him.

But none are more fully under the Tyrannical Power of the *Dumb Devil*, than thoſe unhappy Chriſtians; who, overcome with Shame, chooſe to prophane the moſt ſacred Myſteries of Religion, and continue

tinue under the Burden of an oppreſs'd Conſcience, by wilfully concealing ſome Sin, or aggravating Circumſtance of it, rather than give Glory to God, and Eaſe to their own Souls, by an humble Diſcharge of this Duty: And, how infinitely more deplorable is the Condition of theſe Perſons, than if their Bodies were delivered up to Satan, to be tormented by him? For all this might be, without Prejudice to their eternal Happineſs; becauſe their own Wills might have no Share in it: But theſe unhappy Wretches are the wilful Authors of their own Misfortune. They are under the Power of the Devil, becauſe they are reſolved to be ſo: They are dumb, not for want of Power, but of Will, to ſpeak: And tho' they have the Means of their Deliverance always ready at Hand, if they will but open their Mouths to receive the Benefit of it, they chooſe to continue under their Bondage, rather than give themſelves the Trouble of a momentary Humiliation, to be deliver'd from it.

Since therefore, the Undergoing the Humiliation of Confeſſing all our Sins, is an indiſpenſable Duty; I ſhall treat of it at large, in this and the following Diſcourſe; intending to repreſent the Greatneſs of the *Sin*, as well as *Folly*, a Perſon commits in concealing any thing that is conſider-

able in Confeſſion: The Folly of it ſhall be ſhew'd in my next Diſcourſe; and at preſent, I ſhall only explain the proper Nature and Aggravations of it.

To conceal a Sin in Confeſſion, is a Crime of that Nature, that we cannot doubt but the Devil himſelf is the great Promoter of it: He has a double Aim in tempting Men to it: *Firſt*, to gratify his own Pride and Malice; to which Nothing is more inſupportable, than the humble Confeſſions of repenting Sinners; and 2*dly*, to perpetuate the Slavery of thoſe whom he has already in his Power; well knowing, that if he can but get them into this Snare, he is ſecure of them: We may therefore be well aſſured, that whenever the Shame of Confeſſing any Sin begins to gain Ground ſo far upon us, as to put us upon deliberating whether we ſhall or ſhall not do our Duty, 'tis the Devil ſuggeſts theſe dangerous Thoughts; 'tis the mortal Enemy of our Souls endeavours to tie up our Tongues, that the Hands of Mercy may be for ever ſhut againſt us; 'tis the Father of Lies makes us aſhamed of what alone can procure us a ſolid Glory. *The Devil* (ſays St. *Chryſoſtome*) *inverts the Order eſtabliſhed by God: For the Order eſtabliſhed by him is, that we ſhould be aſhamed to Sin, and glory in confeſſing our Sins: The Devil inverts this Order, and gives*

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us a Confidence to Sin, and a Shame to confeſs.

Whilſt he tempts Men to Sin, 'tis his Buſineſs to make them throw off all Shame; this being one of the greateſt Reſtraints Almighty God has laid upon human Nature: But when the Sin is accompliſh'd; and the Party concern'd begins to look back with a heavy Heart upon the Offence he has committed, then the Devil returns upon him with new Snares; and inſtead of robbing him of Shame as before, he heightens it as much as he can; inſtead of hiding from him the Deformity of his Sin, he ſets it in the broadeſt Light before him, and repreſents it under the moſt frightful Aggravations; not to raiſe in his Heart a penitential Abhorrence of it, but to overwhelm him with ſuch an exceſſive Confuſion for what he has done, that the Difficulty of Confeſſing becoming inſupportable, it may engage him in a deſperate Reſolution of either utterly abandoning the Sacrament of Penance, the only Sanctuary left to ſecure his Return to God; or, what is worſe, to play the Hypocrite, and impoſe upon his Confeſſor.

This is the Devil's ordinary Stratagem, which has ever brought him in ſuch a plentiful Harveſt of Souls, that it is no Wonder he ſhould ſtill continue to practiſe the ſame Cheat upon us: But the great Wonder is, that Chriſtians, who have Light, both of Faith

and Reaſon to guide them, ſhould be ſo eaſily drawn into the Snare, and induced to commit a Sin, attended with ſo many Aggravations; that we may properly call it a Complication of many Crimes, wrapt up in one ſingle Act.

For, *Firſt*, the Party concern'd is guilty of *Sacrilege*; that is, the Abuſe of a Sacrament inſtituted by Chriſt to reſtore Grace to his Soul; and this Abuſe is but the Forerunner of another of a much blacker Nature, *viz.* a ſacrilegious Communion, which follows of courſe.

2*dly*, He is guilty of *Hypocriſy*, in making Uſe of a ſolemn Act of Religion to cover a Sin; in maſking a diabolical Pride with a counterfeit Humility; in affecting to appear moſt religiouſly devout, when he is moſt ſacrilegiouſly wicked: And finally, in pretending a Repentance for Sins paſt, when he is both actually encreaſing his former Guilt, and deſigning ſoon after to add to it another moſt grievous Sin.

3*dly*, He is guilty of *Ingratitude*, in deſpiſing the greateſt Pledges of God's Goodneſs towards him, and fruſtrating, as far as in him lies, the Deſigns of his Mercy; nay uſing his Bleſſings as Arms to fight againſt him.

However, theſe are but the inſeparable Circumſtances of this Sin; but its proper

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and ſpecifick Malice conſiſts in being a wilful and premeditated *Lying to the Holy Ghoſt*: For the better underſtanding whereof, it is to be obſerved, that when a *Prieſt* officiates in the *Sacred Tribunal of Penance*, he acts there as God's Repreſentative, and publick Miniſter of *Jeſus Chriſt*. Now whatever Affront is offered to a publick Miniſter, eſpecially when he acts as ſuch, reflects upon him whoſe Miniſter he is: So that the Behaviour of a Perſon, preſenting himſelf before the Miniſter of Chriſt; in order to treat with him about the important Concern of Salvation, and the making a ſolid and laſting Peace with God; his Behaviour, I ſay, is to be conſidered no otherwiſe, than as if Chriſt himſelf were viſibly preſent to him: And, by conſequence, all Diſſimulation and Double-dealing uſed with a Confeſſor, during the actual Adminiſtration of his ſacred Function, is impoſing upon God himſelf; and *Lying* to the one, is the ſame as *Lying* to the other.

Now, to proceed gradually in ſhewing the Nature of this Sin; let us firſt conſider, how hateful all Sort of *Lying* is to God. *There are ſix Things* (ſays *Solomon*, Prov. vi. 16.) *which God hates*; and the ſecond of theſe is a *Lying Tongue*: Again, in his 12th Chapter, he tells us, that *Lying* Lips

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are an Abomination to the Lord: And therefore, in the 30th Chapter, he humbly prays God to *remove from him all Lying Words.* Now the Reaſon hereof ſeems to be, becauſe *Lying* is directly oppoſite to one of God's Attributes, to wit, *Truth:* And ſince he cannot but love his own Divine Perfections, it follows, that he cannot but hate whatever is directly oppoſite to any of them.

But to be more fully convinced of the Hatred God bears to *Lying*, let us conſider how odious a Quality it is accounted, even amongſt Men: For tho' Man's Reaſon be much obſcured by the Sin he brings into the World, and the numberleſs Paſſions it gives Birth to, which are as ſo many dark Clouds about the Soul; yet, amidſt this Darkneſs, every one has ſtill Light enough to diſcern, in ſome Meaſure, the Beauty and Lovelineſs of Truth; and the ſame Glimpſe of Light, by which we ſee the admirable Beauty of this Virtue, diſcovers at the ſame Time the Deformity of its oppoſite Vice: Whence it is, that all Men in the World naturally hate a *Lying Tongue*; for Proof whereof I need but offer this familiar Inſtance, that no Man, tender of his Credit, can bear the Imputation of it; and that one of the greateſt Affronts that can be put upon a Man of Honour,

Honour, is to give him the Lye: A ſure Mark, that it is judged an infamous Quality, which ſinks a Man to a certain Degree of Meanneſs, and ranks him with the Scum of Mankind: Nay, even thoſe, who are moſt addicted to it, both hate it in others, and hide it, as induſtriouſly as they can, from being remarked in themſelves; as appears in the Trouble and Concern they betray when taxed with it, and the Confuſion they ſuffer when convicted of it.

Hence it appears, that *Lying* is not only univerſally deteſted; but that the Opinion Men have of its Deformity, proceeds from an inbred Principle of Nature; and is ſo deeply rooted, that nothing can efface it: And what Wonder is it then, that *Lying Lips* (as *Solomon* has told us) ſhould be *an Abomination to God?* For if Men, corrupted as they are with Sin, and blinded with Paſſion, are, by a certain irreſiſtable Impreſſion of Nature, ſo enamoured of the admirable Beauty of Truth, that they cannot but regard a *Lying Tongue* as a Thing worthy of Hatred and Averſion; how much more odious and hateful muſt then this Vice be to the pure Eyes of God; who fully comprehending the infinite Excellency of his own Divine Perfections, whereof *Truth* is one, has alſo a clear and comprehenſive Knowledge of the Deformity

mity of Falſhood, Lying, and Diſſimulation; which are the Vices oppoſite to this charming Virtue? He muſt certainly hate the one, as much as he loves the other.

However, there are ſeveral Degrees in the Sin of *Lying*; ſome of which are of a much fouler Complection than others. As for Inſtance; to be caſually ſurpriſed into a trivial or officious Lye, is by all judged but a venial Sin: But to make a Practice even of ſuch Lyes, or to ſtand out ſtifly in a deliberate and ſtudied Lye, (tho' no farther Miſchief attends it) cannot but be very diſpleaſing to God, becauſe it betrays a ſtrong Affection to it; and a wilful Affection to any Sin whatever is a very bad Diſpoſition.

Yet, deliberate Lyes too have their Degrees; which are moſtly taken from the different reciprocal Relations of the Parties concerned: Thus any Inſincerity or Falſehood is a greater Offence in Perſons profeſſing a mutual Confidence in each other, than in others who are wholly free from ſuch Engagements. The ſame may be ſaid of the Relation of a Child to a Parent, or of a Subject to a Perſon veſted with publick Authority; both which give an Aggravation to the Sin of Lying: For tho' Truth and fair Dealing be a Debt we owe *to all* Mankind; yet ſome have, doubtleſs,

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more Title to it than others: So that tho' ſtudied and premeditated Lying be always a very ill Thing, 'tis never more deteſtable, than when nothing but Candour and Sincerity is, upon ſome ſpecial Title, juſtly expected on the one hand, and expreſly profeſſed on the other.

Now then, to return to the Matter before us; I leave every one to judge, from the Conſiderations propoſed, what Sort of Sin it muſt be, to lye to a Confeſſor: For if all Sort of Lying, but eſpecially prepenſed and ſtudied Lying, be very hateful to God, as I have fully ſhewed; if to diſſemble and play the Hypocrite with a Parent or Superior, or any other Perſon, to whom we owe and profeſs nothing but Sincerity and Candour, be yet a fouler Sort of Lying, than when 'tis only practiſed towards an indifferent Perſon; how hateful a Thing muſt it be to come with a premeditated and deliberate Lye to a Miniſter of Chriſt; who, beſides his being a ſpiritual Father, and one to whom we make Profeſſion of the greateſt Confidence, in ſeeming to truſt him with the very Secrets of our Hearts, is, over and above, by Virtue of his Function, the Repreſentative of *Jeſus Chriſt*; how deteſtable, I ſay, is it to juggle and diſſemble with a Perſon of this Character; ſince Lying to ſuch a one is

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not Lying to a Man, but to God himſelf, as I have already told you.

And can a Chriſtian think of ſuch a Sin, without Horror? Is it not a Crime, that juſtly deſerves to be deteſted, with the greateſt Hatred and Averſion? If Chriſt ſhould manifeſt himſelf viſibly to us, durſt we have the Boldneſs to diſſemble with him; or attempt to paſs a Lye upon him? And is it not the ſame Affront, whether he be preſent to us in his own Perſon; or in the Perſon of his Miniſter? It is ſo without all Diſpute; ſince he has expreſly declared, that *he who deſpiſes his Miniſters, deſpiſes him; and he who deſpiſes him, deſpiſes his Father who ſent him.* For, if to deſpiſe God's Miniſters, be to deſpiſe God himſelf; to lie to God's Miniſter, is to lie to God himſelf: As it yet farther declared by St. *Peter*, upon a certain Occaſion; wherein God thought fit to manifeſt his Hatred to this Sin, by ſo ſevere and exemplary a Judgment; as ſtruck the whole Church with Terror and Amazement.

I preſume, ye all gueſs, I mean the tragical End of *Ananias* and *Saphira*; who having ſold an Eſtate, pretended, as other Chriſtians had done, to bring the whole Price of it to St. *Peter:* Whereas, in effect, they had kept back ſome Part of it for their own private Uſe. But St. *Peter*, knowing

knowing by Divine Revelation, the Cheat they came to put upon him, was deeply wounded at Heart; and being moved with a juſt Indignation, ſpoke thus to *Ananias*; *Why has Satan tempted thy Heart to lye unto the Holy Ghoſt? For thou haſt not lyed unto Men, but unto God.* Whereupon the unfortunate Wretch, as one thunder-ſtruck, fell down dead at St. *Peter*'s Feet; and a few Minutes after, his Wife, who had been an Accomplice with him in his Crime, received the ſame Reward of her Hypocriſy.

This is the Account given us by St. *Luke*, of the exemplary Judgment, that befel this unhappy Couple: And 'tis to be particularly obſerved; that St. *Peter* ſtiles their Sin, *a Lying to the Holy Ghoſt.* For though he knew the Cheat was immediately intended and practiſed upon himſelf; yet, in as much, as he was Chriſt's *Miniſter*, he conſidered the Injury as done to God himſelf; and ſo the Puniſhment was proportioned accordingly. However, we may farther obſerve, that in the Caſe of theſe two Perſons, ſo ſeverely puniſhed; there was neither *Sacrilege* nor *Injuſtice*; but the whole Charge againſt them was, *Lying* and *Hypocriſy:* Whereas, in the Caſe of a falſe-hearted Penitent, beſides Foul-dealing, Diſſimulation, Hypocriſy, and

and *Lying to the Holy Ghoſt*; there is over and above, as I have already obſerved, a Sacrament prophaned; God's Bleſſings abuſed; his Mercies trampled upon; and the moſt effectual Means of Amendment, turned into an Occaſion of greater Sins: So that, all Circumſtances duly weigh'd, it plainly appears, that the Crime of a counterfeit Penitent, is far more grievous in itſelf; and, by conſequence, more deteſtable in the Sight of God, than the Sin he thought fit to expreſs his Hatred to, by ſuch a terrifying and exemplary Judgment.

But, does he then let this Sin go unrevenged? No ſurely: For though the Criminal ſuffers no preſent Puniſhment in Body, his Soul falls under the Malediction of God, in the very Inſtant he commits the Fact. So that whilſt his deluded Confeſſor, acting to the beſt of his Knowledge, is buſy in pronouncing his Abſolution; Almighty God, who cannot be impoſed upon, looks down upon him with Indignation; and inſtead of *cancelling the Hand-writing, that was againſt him*, ratifies it in the Court of Heaven; and from his inviſible Tribunal, dooms his Soul to an Encreaſe of Torments, anſwerable to the Encreaſe of his Guilt.

It is true, the Time of Life, being a Time of Mercy, the Sentence pronounced againſt

againſt him may be reverſed; provided he renders himſelf worthy of it: And in Regard hereof, he is ever bound to acknowledge God's infinite Goodneſs, in allowing him that Time of Forbearance, which he refuſed to thoſe, who were guilty of a leſs grievous Sin: Nay, this Conſideration alone furniſhes Motive enough, to raiſe in his Soul, the greateſt Deteſtation of the Sin he has committed: And ſince it is without Diſpute, that God expects he ſhould make this Uſe of the Forbearance he favours him with; if he neglects to do it, he only lives on to his greater Condemnation; and it had been happier for him, had the ſame Judgment, which followed *Ananias* and *Sapbira* ſo cloſe at the Heels, alſo overtaken him in the very Inſtant, he not only imitated but out-did their Crime.

I ſhall cloſe my Diſcourſe, with an Admonition to all ſuch, as are charged with the Government of Children; to uſe their utmoſt Watchfulneſs and Care, to bring them up with the greateſt Abhorrence poſſible, of the Vice of *Lying*. The particular Reaſon of this Caution, is becauſe (beſides that *Lying* is a very bad Quality in itſelf; and the Mother of many other ill ones, that either ſpawn from it, or take ſhelter under it;) there is one very great Miſchief attending it, which many perhaps

have

have never thought of, *viz.* That a Habit of *Lying* out of the Confeſſional, is a fair Step towards *Lying* in Confeſſion. For 'tis with this, as with all other Vices; its Progreſs is gradual, and gains upon us almoſt imperceptibly.

Children begin at firſt with little Excuſes, very near a-kin to Lyes, to cover their ordinary Faults; and prevent their being chid or corrected by their Parents. By doing this often, and finding the Benefit of it, they proceed inſenſibly to downright *Lying*, whenever it ſerves their Turn. As this grows cuſtomary and familiar, the Horror of it wears off; Nature takes a Bent that Way; they grow harden'd to it by Degrees: And thus, a falſe and inſincere Temper being contracted by a long Cuſtom of *Lying* to Men, diſpoſes them inſenſibly, to venture upon *Lying* to God himſelf. For this Reaſon, all thoſe that are employ'd about Children, ſhould make it their Buſineſs, to inſpire them, from their very Infancy, with a Love for Truth, and Hatred to Lying: And in order to it, whenever this Vice happens to be mention'd before them, it ought always to be ſpoken of with the utmoſt Deteſtation; and repreſented in ſuch Colours, as may give them a ſenſible Horror of it.

But

But Care ſhould be alſo taken, that Children ſhould always fare the worſe for telling a Lye; and the better for owning the Truth. For if they find by Experience, that they are ever in Danger of being Loſers by Lying, and ſure of being Gainers by ſpeaking the Truth; this will inſenſibly nouriſh in them, an Hatred of the one, and a Love and Eſteem of the other: The Effect whereof will be, that being brought up from their Infancy, with an Averſion to all Untruth; Sincerity will become habitual, and almoſt natural to them: And ſince the beſt Security againſt Sin, is to keep at the greateſt Diſtance from it; 'tis evident that thoſe, who have an Abhorrence even of any Sort of Lying, will not eaſily become guilty of the fouleſt Part of it; and the Saying of Chriſt will be verified in this, as well as other Inſtances; *viz. He that is faithful in that which is leaſt, is faithful alſo in much.* Luke vi. 10.

The

The LVIIth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Folly of concealing any Sin in Confeſſion.

Be not aſhamed to ſpeak Truth for thy Soul: for there is a Confuſion, that cauſeth Death; and there is a Confuſion, that bringeth Glory and Grace. Eccl. iv. 24, 25.

THE Confuſion *that cauſeth Death*, is that which hinders a Sinner from laying open the true State of his Conſcience; without which, his Soul can never be reſtored to the Life of Grace. But the Confuſion, which has *Grace* in this Life, and eternal *Glory* in the next, for its Reward, is that, which a Penitent ſubmits to, in becoming his own Accuſer. Whence it appears, that the Concealment of any Sin, in Confeſſion, is not only the Addition o a moſt grievous Sin, as has been proved in the former Diſcourſe; but is over and above, the very higheſt Strain of Folly and Madneſs; as ſhall be ſhewn at large in this Entertainment.

If a Sinner, by impoſing upon his Confeſſor, could at the ſame Time deceive Almighty

mighty God; if by concealing his Sins from the Knowledge of a Man, he could alſo hide them from the All-ſeeing Eyes of *Jeſus Chriſt*; finally, if his avoiding a momentary Confuſion in this Life, were a Means to ſhelter them againſt eternal Confuſion hereafter, then indeed he would not altogether want Encouragement to play the Hypocrite, and deal unfairly with God's Miniſter: And tho', in ſo doing, he might be tax'd with Irreligion and Sacrilege, he could not however be accuſed of Weakneſs and Folly.

But Alas! the Caſe is quite otherwiſe: The Ulcers of his Soul, tho' never ſo induſtriouſly conceal'd from the Eyes of Men, lie always open to the Eyes of God: That very Sin, which he ſeeks to hide from his Confeſſor, is already regiſter'd in the great Book of Accounts; and nothing, but an humble Confeſſion of it, can hinder it from appearing againſt him to his everlaſting Confuſion, both at the Hour of Death, and the great Day of Aſſizes: And is it not then an unaccountable Folly to refuſe a Compliance with a Duty; when there is no Proſpect of Advantage to encourage a Perſon's Tranſgreſſing againſt it, and his ſubmitting to it, is the only Means to reſcue him from everlaſting Evils.

Suppoſe

Suppoſe a Criminal condemn'd to die, ſhould have his Pardon offer'd him, for only owning his Crime in private, to one deputed by the Judge; would he not be thought to have loſt his Reaſon, if he ſhould refuſe to ſubmit to ſuch eaſy Terms? All Men would certainly pronounce him guilty of exceſſive Madneſs and Cruelty to himſelf. Since therefore Almighty God impoſes no harder Condition on Sinners, and engages his Word to deliver thoſe that ſubmit ſincerely to it from eternal Death, and the endleſs Miſeries their Sins have deſerved; what Madneſs and Infatuation is it to reject ſo great a Mercy, and rather chooſe to continue under the Sentence of eternal Damnation, than purchaſe their Pardon at ſo cheap a Rate.

You will ſay perhaps, the Condition required is not ſo eaſy as is pretended; ſince to declare one's ſecret Sins, is a Thing to which Man's Nature has the greateſt Repugnance: But to ſilence theſe Reaſonings of human Pride; let us ſuppoſe the ordinary Puniſhment of every Sin we commit, were, to have it expoſed as long as we live, to the View of every one we converſe with; and then I aſk whether, in this Caſe, a Sinner would not be very mercifully dealt with, if to deliver himſelf from this publick and *laſting* Confuſion, he were only obliged to confeſs

confeſs his Sins in private to a ſingle Perſon? And whether his refuſing to accept the Condition, would not draw on him the Imputation of Folly and Madneſs? The Caſe admits of no Diſpute, ſince common Prudence directs every one to chooſe the leſſer of two Evils.

This then being ſuppoſed, will clearly anſwer all Difficulties pretended on the Score of natural Repugnance to the Duty in Queſtion: For let there be the greateſt Repugnance in Nature to it; if ſubmitting be the only Means a Sinner has left him to prevent Evils infinitely greater, even in the ſame kind, than what he pretends to avoid; his refuſing to comply with the Condition, cannot be excuſed from the moſt extravagant Weakneſs and Folly. It remains then only to ſhew, that the Shame and Confuſion which will fall upon an impenitent Sinner in the Life to come, will not only be infinitely greater than what he apprehends in Confeſſing his Sins, but will, in every Reſpect, exceed any Confuſion poſſible in this World; even tho' all his ſecret Sins were to be continually expoſed to the View of every one that ſees or knows him.

To make this clearly out, let us but compare the one with the other. And *firſt*, as to their Duration, 'tis plain that the longeſt Confuſion a Perſon can ſuffer in this

fuſion due to our Sins, for a momentary Humiliation before one ſingle Perſon; who, as you all know, is under the ſtricteſt Obligation of an inviolable Secrecy, that human and divine Laws can lay upon him; and whether our Refuſing to ſubmit to ſuch eaſy Terms of Reconciliation, be not a Weakneſs and Folly more becoming a Man out of his Senſes, than one that pretends to Judgment and Reaſon?

However, to convince you ſtill more fully of this Truth, I ſhall make it appear, that Confeſſing our Sins is recommendable even for the preſent Eaſe it gives; and that the Confuſion, which uſually attends it has no real Foundation, but is wholly grounded upon Miſtake and a deluded Imagination. As to the *firſt*, I have Experience clearly on my ſide: For, every one that is not wholly given up to a reprobate Senſe, muſt own from his own Experience, that Sin upon a Conſcience is a Thorn, that never ceaſes to gall and fret, till it be pluck'd up. It is as an Impoſtume in the Body; and as it is impoſſible for the Body to be at Eaſe, till the Impoſtume be open'd, and the corrupt Matter let out, ſo is it no leſs impoſſible for a Sinner's Conſcience to be at Eaſe, till it be fully laid open by a ſincere Confeſſion, and ſo clear'd of the Corruption *that* oppreſs'd it. So that, let a Sinner

flatter

flatter himſelf as he pleaſes, Experience will convince him, that nothing but plain Dealing, and frankly declaring his Sins, without Artifice, Shuffling, or Diſguiſe, will ever procure him that which is the greateſt Bleſſing of human Life, a true and ſolid Peace of Mind.

And as to the *other* Part, *viz.* That the Confuſion a Penitent ſuffers in Confeſſing his Sins is all grounded upon Miſtake; I need but ſhew, that the Fear he has to loſe his Confeſſor's Eſteem by it, is wholly vain and imaginary: For it would be very ſtrange if that, which is the only Means to reſtore a Sinner to God's Favour and Eſteem, ſhould leſſen him in the Opinion of God's Miniſter. But the Thing is quite otherwiſe: *Firſt*, Becauſe, whatever Guilt a Perſon is charged with, an humble and ſincere Confeſſion makes Atonement for it; and is ſo far from diſcrediting the Penitent, that nothing recommends him more effectually to the Eſteem, and even tendereſt Affection of his ghoſtly Father: For 'tis then he regards the Penitent, as a true Copy of the Prodigal Son returning to his Father; 'tis then he rejoices for the Recovery of the loſt Sheep, and invites all the Saints and Angels to ſhare with him in his Joy.

Secondly, Becauſe Truth and Sincerity are ſuch charming Virtues; that a true Penitent ever gains more that Way, than he can loſe by being his own Accuſer. And,

Thirdly, Becauſe tho' Sin, whilſt it ſubſiſts, may deſervedly bring the Party concerned under Diſ-eſteem or Contempt; yet, in Relation to a Penitent, it quite changes its Nature: For 'tis then conſider'd as a Thing no longer in Being, or as a Thing that never was at all; becauſe a Sin, once blotted out by Repentance, is, in effect, the ſame, as to its Guilt, as if it had never been committed. It is certainly ſo in the Judgment of Almighty God; who, when a Sinner returns ſeriouſly to him, forgets his Sins paſt as utterly, and has the ſame Love for him, as if he never had been guilty of any: And therefore every one ought to do that Juſtice to his Confeſſor, as to believe he underſtands his Duty better, than to entertain Sentiments directly oppoſite to thoſe of Almighty God; or to harbour in his Heart an ill Opinion of one, whom he has Reaſon to regard as a Perſon honoured with the Friendſhip of Almighty God.

It is true, a Confeſſor cannot have an infallible Aſſurance of the Repentance of the Party that preſents himſelf before him: However, he is always bound to ſuppoſe *it, as* long as nothing appears to ground a contrary

contrary Judgment; and every one may be aſſured, that one of the beſt Marks he can have of the good Diſpoſition of a Penitent, is, to find him frank and ſincere in opening his Conſcience to him; whereas, if he has Reaſon to ſuſpect him guilty of Double-dealing, he cannot but entertain a very uncomfortable Opinion of him.

But let us, after all, ſuppoſe a Perſon, by accuſing himſelf, ſhould, in ſome Meaſure, forfeit the Eſteem of his Confeſſor: Is this a rational Motive to play the Hypocrite, and continue under the Guilt of mortal Sin? How many are there in the World, who ſtick not to deal very plainly with their Phyſicians, tho' they have the greateſt Repugnance to it? And ought we not then to be as ready to ſuffer ſomething in Compliance with our Duty to God, and to prevent irreparable Miſchiefs from falling upon us? Or are we not infinitely more cruel and barbarous to ourſelves, in wilfully multiplying the mortal Diſtempers of our Souls by a criminal Silence, than if we took the ſame Courſe to deſtroy our Bodies?

But here I ſhould be glad to aſk a Perſon concerned in this Crime, what it is he propoſes to himſelf? Does he ever intend to confeſs the Sin he has concealed, or not? If not, then he renounces all Hopes

of Salvation, and reſolves directly to damn himſelf: And what a deſperate Reſolution is this in one, who believes there are eternal Flames prepared for thoſe who die in mortal Sin? But, if he reſolves to confeſs it ſometime or other, why not ſooner as well as later? Nay, why not at firſt, as well as afterwards? For the longer he runs on in this Courſe, the harder it will be to get out of it: Becauſe whenever he ſets about it, beſides his being then bound to declare the Sin till then concealed, and the Number of Sacrileges ſince added to it over and above; all Confeſſions, ſince his firſt Abuſe of the Sacrament, being void and null, muſt be looked back into, and repeated.

And is not the ripping up of ſo many old Sores, and the unravelling a Conſcience perplexed with Multiplicity of Sins, a Taſk that will put him to a much greater Shame and Confuſion, than what he pretends to decline at firſt? Is it not much eaſier to confeſs a ſingle Sin, whatever it be, than when it comes attended with a long Train of other Sins, beſides the grievous Aggravation of Sacrilege? This therefore being the unavoidable Conſequence of ſacrilegious Confeſſions, in Relation to one that is not reſolutely bent upon damning himſelf; 'tis evident, that all

all Delays and Put-offs in this Matter, cannot but increaſe the very Difficulty upon which they are pretended, and ſerve to no other Purpoſe, than to cut out Work for a ſadder Repentance, and a more mortifying Shame.

But ſome perhaps depend upon an eaſier Expedient; *viz.* of making one Confeſſion for all upon their Death-bed: For then, ſay they, they care not what their Confeſſors think of them. But ſuppoſe this fine Project ſhould miſcarry; ſuppoſe they ſhould die ſuddenly, or be out of their Senſes in their laſt Sickneſs; what becomes of them then? Are they not loſt without Remedy? However, allowing them the faireſt Chance ſuch an Unchriſtian Deſign will admit of, it is but too much to be feared, that they who confeſs not till they juſt feel themſelves dropping into Deſtruction, are ſo diſpoſed at Heart, that they would not even confeſs then, had they any Proſpect of a longer Life: And they muſt give me Leave to tell them, that a Confeſſion made with this Diſpoſition, is but a very unſafe Bottom to hazard their Salvation upon. Beſides, what is done under a great Fright and Conſternation, proceeding moſtly from a mere ſervile Fear; the Confeſſion and Repentance a Sinner is ſcared into by ſeeing Hell-fire juſt before

him, looks ſo like that of a Man upon the Rack, who is willing to ſay or do any thing for a little Eaſe, that there is all the Reaſon in the World to ſuſpect there is more of Shew than Reality in it.

I ſay not this to encourage Deſpondency in any one, that ſhould prove ſo unhappy as to have put Things upon the laſt Hazard; becauſe, whatever his Caſe may be, endeavouring to repent, and make his Peace with God, is certainly the beſt Thing he can do at any Time whatever; and the laſt Moments of his Life cannot be better employed, than in a Work ſo neceſſary, as that of Confeſſing, and Repenting: However, I think myſelf bound to deter all Men from hazarding their Salvation upon ſo great an Uncertainty, and letting Things come to a Paſs, that a Death-bed Repentance is all they have to depend upon.

In a Word, Almighty God is not to be mocked; and thoſe who deſignedly put off the confeſſing their Sins till they come to die, will, I fear, find, by woful Experience, that they have only played the Devil's Game for him, and been induſtrious in laying Snares to their own Souls. Let us beſeech Almighty God, to preſerve all Chriſtians from this fatal Blindneſs; and infuſe into their Souls ſo large a Portion of *the Spirit* of Truth, that they may ever abomi-

abominate all Inſincerity or Double-dealing; but eſpecially when the Honour of his holy Sacraments is concerned, and their own eternal Intereſt lies at Stake.

The LVIIIth ENTERTAINMENT.

The fatal Conſequences of unworthy Communions.

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himſelf. 1 Cor. xi. 29.

SAcrilegious Confeſſions, (of which enough has been ſaid) uſually lead the Way to unworthy Communions; the fatal Conſequences whereof ſhall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

Before I enter upon this Subject, I ſhall explain briefly, the Nature of this Sin; which St. *Paul* expreſſes in the ſtrongeſt Terms poſſible, when he tells us, that *Whoever ſhall eat this Bread, or drink the Cup of the Lord unworthily, ſhall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord.* 1 Cor. xi. 27. The Reaſon whereof is thus given by St. *Chryſoſtome*: Becauſe (ſays he) whoever

whoever approaches to this Divine Table unworthily, is like thoſe, who pierced the Body of our Lord; not to drink, but to ſpill his Blood: That is to ſay, not to apply to themſelves, the ſpiritual Fruit and Benefit of it, but to prophane it, and *trample it under Foot*, according to St. *Paul*'s Expreſſion in another Place.

Whence it follows, that the Sin of an unworthy Communicant is *Sacrilege* in the higheſt Degree: Becauſe, the ſpecifick Nature of this Sin conſiſting in an Abuſe or Prophanation of any thing that is *Holy*; the Conſequence is, that it is more or leſs enormous, in Proportion to the Holineſs of the Thing that is abuſed. A Church is, for Example, holy; and the Altar and Veſſels belonging to it are likewiſe holy; becauſe they are conſecrated to holy Uſes; and a contemptuous Abuſe of any of theſe Things is Sacrilege in a certain Degree; tho' 'tis manifeſt they have no intrinſick Holineſs inherent in them, but are only holy from the Relation they have to the infinite Holineſs of God, to whoſe Service they are appropriated. But the bleſſed *Euchariſt* is intrinſically, nay, infinitely holy; becauſe it contains the very Source and Fountain of Holineſs, and it is literally true, that *in it dwells the Godhead corporal: So that* it eminently excells the other Sacraments

craments in Dignity; and is not meerly an outward Sign of Grace, or Channel through which it is convey'd to the Soul, but the Source itſelf, from which all Grace and Bleſſings flow.

This makes it plain what I ſaid juſt now, *viz.* That the Sin of an unworthy Communicant is *Sacrilege in the higheſt Degree:* Becauſe, as the Thing prophaned by him is ſuperlatively holy, ſo is the Prophanation of it moſt ſuperlatively ſacrilegious and wicked; and whereas in other Caſes of Sacrilege, the Prophanation regards at moſt but Things that have a near Relation to God, in this it is level'd againſt God himſelf, and ſtrikes directly at him. And is not this a moſt enormous and deteſtable Sin! Ought we not to have the greateſt Horror of it!

Now then, let us ſee the Hatred God bears to *Sacrilege* of any kind whatever; and with what Severity he has often puniſh'd it even in this Life; that we may gather from thence what Treatment a ſacrilegious Communicant may juſtly expect at his Hands: For in the firſt Place, we find the bare Prophanation of the material Temple of *Jeruſalem*, repreſented by God himſelf as a Crime, he reſolved to puniſh in the moſt exemplary Manner. His Words, *Ezekiel* the 5th, are as follow; *Wherefore*

I live,

tion'd Offenders: For what compariſon can there be between his Crime and theirs? Are not the Inſtitutions of Chriſtian Religion and and its Sacraments, eſpecially the Sacrament of the *Body* and *Blood* of Chriſt, more holy than the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Moſaick Law*? Or is not Chriſt himſelf infinitely more holy than the *Jewiſh* Temple, or the *Ark* or *Veſſels* belonging to it? The Matter will admit of no Diſpute: Nor can we therefore doubt but that the Puniſhment of an unworthy Communicant, who abuſes God in his own Perſon, will be proportionably more grievous, as he is more criminal than they, who only affronted him in the Prophanation of Things that had a Relation to him.

If then the very loweſt Degree of Sacrilege was puniſh'd ſo ſeverely by Almighty God; with what Rigour will his Juſtice one Day revenge the wicked Abuſe of the *Holy of Holies?* If his Indignation was ſo kindled againſt the Prophaners of his Temple; with what Fury will it diſcharge itſelf upon thoſe, who offer the boldeſt Indignities to the Majeſty of God himſelf? Finally, if Idolaters themſelves were chaſtiſed with ſuch remarkable Severity, only for placing the *Ark of the Covenant* in the Temple of *Dagon*; can Chriſtians, who *place* the Son of God in Temples defiled

with

with Sin, and inhabited by the Devil, preſume their Crime will not draw upon them Puniſhments anſwerable to the Grievouſneſs of it?

I own, I cannot but wonder that thoſe, who go to commit it with full Knowledge and Deliberation, ſhould not fear to fall into the Hands of the *living God*, and be made Examples of his Juſtice upon the very Spot; as ſome others, who have had the Boldneſs to attempt it, have been before them, if we may believe St. *Cyprian* and St. *Chryſoſtome*; who relate, that ſeveral in their Times became diſtracted, upon their having communicated unworthily: St. *Cyprian* alſo relates, that ſome others were deliver'd over to be poſſeſs'd and tormented by the Devil for the ſame Crime; and that a certain Woman, having in private eaten of Meats that had been offer'd to Idols, and coming not long after to communicate with other Chriſtians, had no ſooner received the Bleſſed Sacrament, but found herſelf inwardly tormented, as if ſhe had taken ſome ſtrong Poiſon, and died immediately upon it, to the great Terror of the whole Aſſembly. The ſame Father relates ſome other very terrifying Examples of this Nature, which I omit for Brevity-Sake; theſe few ſufficing to convince us how dangerous

it is to be concerned in a Crime, which may draw the like Judgments on us.

However, I muſt own theſe viſible Judgments are but rare, comparatively to the Number of thoſe that deſerve them: For 'tis with this Crime as with all others; they are always equally abominable in the Sight of God: But he contents himſelf with having manifeſted his Hatred of them, by ſome viſible Examples of his Juſtice upon particular Offenders of each kind: The reſt he remits, for their deſerv'd Reward, to the to the World to come. Thus he has ſufficiently teſtified his Hatred to *Murder*, *Adultery*, *Perjury*, &c. by now and then inflicting exemplary Chaſtiſements upon Murderers, Adulterers, and thoſe that forſwear themſelves; tho' innumerable others, as guilty as they in the ſame kind, have eſcaped without any ſuch Judgments falling upon them.

And thus it is in Reference to the Crime we now ſpeak of. Almighty God has abundantly taken Care to let us know how provoking a Sin it is to abuſe his holy Sacraments, by the exemplary Rigour, wherewith he has ſometimes revenged it: Many, perhaps more deeply concern'd, ſeem to eſcape unpuniſh'd, and this emboldens them to perſiſt in their Crime: But let them not preſume too long: The Delay of Payment only

only increaſes the Debt, which will be, ſooner or later, demanded to the laſt Farthing. *Let not any one* (ſays St. *Cyprian*, ſpeaking of unworthy Communicants) *imagine he has eſcaped Puniſhment, becauſe it is as yet ſomewhat delay'd; ſince God's delaying to chaſtiſe his Sins, ought rather to increaſe his Fear.* For when Almighty God ſeems to take no Notice even of the moſt crying Sins, and holds his Hand even when he is moſt provoked to ſtrike, it is a Sign the Offender is reſerved for an After-Blow, and mark'd out for an everlaſting Victim of the ſevereſt Juſtice.

However, if we judge of Things by Faith, we ſhall find, an unworthy Communicant goes not unpuniſh'd, even in this Life; tho' no viſible Judgment falls upon him: For tho' God's ſends him no viſible Plagues, he delivers up his Soul to inviſible ones, more fatal to him, than if all the Plagues of *Egypt* fell upon him: The firſt of theſe is the *Death* of his Soul, or rather an Increaſe of Death, if I may call it ſo: For tho' the Death of the Body admits of no Degrees, but it is the ſame whether it be occaſion'd by one or a thouſand mortal Wounds; it is not ſo with the Death of the Soul: Every mortal Sin is an Increaſe of it, in as much as it removes the Soul at a greater Diſtance from God, makes her

Return

Return to him more difficult, puts a freſh Obſtacle to her recovering the Life of Grace, and gives the Devil a ſtronger hold of her.

Now if theſe be the Effects of any additional Guilt, the Abuſe of the Sacraments muſt needs be attended with them in a far greater Degree; becauſe the very Nature and Effect of this Sin, is to obſtruct the very Source and Fountain of Grace, by rendring that, which ſhould nouriſh and ſtrengthen the Life of the Soul, not only uſeleſs; but hurtful and poiſonous to her, and converting the very beſt Remedy againſt Sin, into an Occaſion of its greateſt Increaſe: And can any thing either remove the Soul farther from God, or put her more fully into the Devil's Power? Nothing certainly can ſo effectually eſtabliſh his Dominion, or fix him more firmly in the Heart.

Hence follow two other fatal Effects of unworthy Communions; *viz. Blindneſs* and *Hardneſs* of Heart; which ſeem to be prophetically denounced in theſe Words of the *Pſalmiſt: Let their Table become a Snare before them, and let that, which ſhould have been their Welfare, become a Trap. Let their Eyes be darken'd that they ſee not. Let them always bend under the Weight of their Sins. Pour fourth thy Indignation upon them, and*

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let thy wrathful Anger take hold of them. Nor is this to be wonder'd at, ſince the farther the Soul is remov'd from the Light of Grace, and divine Illuſtrations, and the more ſhe is in the Power of the Prince of Darkneſs, the more ſhe muſt needs be blinded with her own ſinful Luſts; which meeting with no Oppoſition from the Grace of the Sacraments to reſtrain them, lead her captive at Pleaſure, and engage her, by inſenſible Degrees, in any Sin corrupt Nature ſhall ſuggeſt to her.

Whence follows, of courſe, the *Hardneſs of Heart*, which I have mention'd for the *third* Effect of ſacrilegious Communions: However, there needs not many Steps or Degrees to bring Men to this unhappy Diſpoſition, when their Conſciences are once ſufficiently embolden'd to attempt ſo black a Crime with full Knowledge. It is true, the Fear of human Laws, or Shame to be thought ſcandalous may be a Curb upon them; but ſurely no Terror of Conſcience can reſtrain them after this: For what Crime can be frightful enough to ſtartle a Conſcience, that has had the Boldneſs to outrage God in his own Perſon? Will a Child, that dares affront his Father to his Face, have the leaſt Regard to his Commands upon a Principle of Duty? Will a Subject, that is bold enough to abuſe his Sovereign

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in his Preſence, ſtick to trample upon his Laws? And what then will not a Chriſtian be capable of committing, when he is once become ſo deſtitute of Conſcience, as to offer the greateſt Indignity even to the King of Heaven and Earth? So that, what with the Boldneſs of the Crime on the one hand, and the With-drawings of Grace, and Blindneſs it cauſes on the other, there is no one Sin contributes more effectually to harden Men againſt all Terror of Conſcience, and make him venture at any thing, than that of wilful unworthy Communions.

But what does all this uſually tend to It is thus the unworthy Communicant, like a Victim fitted for Slaughter, is inſenſibly prepared for the Execution of the dreadful Sentence that paſs'd upon him, when he committed the Fact: For, at the Inſtant a Communicant receives the Sacrament unworthily, *Jeſus Chriſt*, erecting his inviſible Tribunal in the midſt of his Heart, pronounces Sentence of eternal Damnation upon him, or rather changes the Sentence formerly incurr'd into a much ſeverer one; and 'tis this St. *Paul* calls *eating and drinking Judgment to himſelf.* Becauſe as often as he eats or drinks unworthily, he falls *under* a freſh Sentence of Condemnation; which,

which, in Proportion to the new Crime added, is ever more and more ſevere than the former.

It is true, this Sentence is not irrevocably fix'd; but God is ready to reverſe it upon the ſincere Repentance of the Offender. However, it is moſt certain that ſome Sinners are harder to be reclaim'd and wreſted out of the Devil's Power than others; and I fear unworthy Communicants are of this unhappy Number. They have abuſed God in his greateſt Bleſſings; and made void the beſt Remedies provided by him for their Cure; God's ſanctifying Grace is withdrawn from them; their Enemy is doubly fortified againſt them; and the Blood of Chriſt, the moſt ſovereign Balm for a wounded Conſcience, by their Abuſe of it, lies heavy upon their Souls, and ſeems rather to cry for Vengeance, than plead for Mercy. All theſe Circumſtances render the Caſe of an unworthy Communicant very deplorable, and look upon him with an ominous Aſpect, as ſeeming to forbode, that tho' the Time of Forbearance allow'd him, be abſolutely improveable to the Salvation of his Soul, if he but takes the right Courſe; it will probably, only be abuſed by him to his greater Condemnation.

In effect, all this came to paſs in the Caſe of the unforunate *Judas*; who ought to be the Terorr, as he was the firſt Example,

ample, of an unworthy Communicant: For he had no ſooner eaten the conſecrated Morſel given him by Chriſt, but the Devil enter'd into him, as St. *John* relates; and it is probable that in that very Inſtant, the Devil confirm'd him in his wicked Deſign of betraying his Maſter: For, from that Inſtant forwards, he was deliver'd up to a reprobate Senſe; his Soul was wholly blinded with Avarice, which was his predominant Paſſion; and his Heart was ſo harden'd, that neither the Remembrance of paſt Favours, nor the Wonders he had been Eye-witneſs of, nor the touching Things our Saviour ſaid then to him, could work any Effect upon him; but hurried on by the evil Spirit that poſſeſs'd him, he went immediately forth to execute his wicked Deſign; and every Step he made, after that, contributed to haſten him towards the terrible Judgment that was waiting for him, and fell upon him the very Day after he had committed his Crime; when, as you all know, he fill'd up the Meaſure of his Sins by Self-Murder, and died in Deſpair.

Here you ſee the natural Effects of an unworthy Communion exactly repreſented in the Reprobation, Blindneſs, Obduratneſs, and final Deſpair of him, who gave the firſt Example of it: I ſay, the natural *Effects*: For tho' God's infinite Mercy and

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the Power of his Grace may, and does many times prevent them; yet the Nature of the Crime itſelf is ſuch, as leads Men, by inſenſible Degrees, to all the fatal Diſpoſitions I have remark'd, which alſo naturally draw after them final Impenitence and Deſpair; eſpecially if a Perſon be ſo unhappy, as to be overtaken by his laſt Sickneſs, whilſt he is yet in the Practice of this Crime. For I cannot imagine any thing can be a heavier Load upon a Conſcience in that Caſe, or a more dead Weight to ſink him into Deſpair; than when he reflects, upon his Death-bed, that he is going to appear before the Tribunal of Jeſus Chriſt, whoſe Blood he has ſo often been guilty of; and that the only Thing he has now to depend upon, is the Grace of thoſe very Sacraments he has till then abuſed. Theſe Reflections, I ſay, will, in the Caſe ſuppoſed, be a moſt violent Temptation to Deſpair; and the Devil, who now labours to lull Men's Conſciences aſleep, whilſt they are in perfect Health, will not only be the firſt Suggeſter of deſpairing Thoughts in their laſt Sickneſs, but make it his Buſineſs to heighten them to the utmoſt of his Power.

However, if this ſhould happen to be the Caſe of any Perſon, he is bound to bear up with all his Strength againſt any Suggeſti-

ons of that Nature; to regard them as the laſt Efforts of the Devil's Malice againſt him; and raiſe in his Soul the greateſt Horror and Deteſtation of them: Becauſe his Salvation depends then abſolutely, upon his reſiſting them with all his Force. But the ſecureſt Way is not to let Things go ſo far, but to prevent the Danger of ſo violent a Temptation, by a ſincere Repentance in Time of Health; and ſince all Sinners have it in their Power to take this Courſe, it is undoubtedly the Intereſt as well as Duty of every unfortunate Chriſtian, who finds his Conſcience charged with the Guilt of ſacrilegious Communions, not to let ſlip the Opportunity, which the Divine Bounty now favours him with, of applying to his Soul the Remedies neceſſary for his Cure: And therefore, the farther he has departed from God, the more Haſte he muſt make to return to him, with the ſincere Repentance of a contrite and humbled Heart: And whereas his principal Guilt conſiſts in having abuſed his holy Sacraments, his principal Care muſt alſo be to repair thoſe Abuſes, as far as in him lies: *Firſt*, By making good the Defects of all former Confeſſions; at leaſt from that time forwards, in which he firſt became guilty of that Sin: *Secondly*, by ſubmitting to any Terms of Reconciliation, his Confeſſor ſhall propoſe

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to him: And *3dly*, by approaching ever after to the Holy Table with ſuch a ſincere Humility, Reſpect, and Devotion, as may be ſome Atonement for his Abuſes committed againſt it. If he performs theſe Conditions, he may confidently rely upon the infinite Goodneſs of his Redeemer; and animate himſelf with an aſſured Hope, that that very Blood, which would have call'd for Vengeance, had he continued in the Abuſe of it, will now cry ſo powerfully to to Heaven for Mercy, as to render him eternally Partaker of the Fruits of it.

The LIXth ENTERTAINMENT.

Chriſt's Love in inſtituting the Bleſſed Sacrament.

A certain Man made a great Supper. Luke xiv. 16.

UNder the Figure of the Supper here mention'd, is ſignified, *Firſt*, that everlaſting Banquet in Heaven; where the bleſſed Souls are *inebriated with the Plenty of the Houſe of God:* And *Secondly*, the Sacrament of the Holy Euchariſt, which con-

tains the real *Body* and *Blood* of *Jeſus Chriſt*; and is a *Supper truly great*: A Supper indeed fitter for Angels than Men; and ſuited in all Things to the infinite Greatneſs and Liberality of him that is the Maſter of it: For is it not a Banquet of ineſtimable Value? Could either God's infinite Wiſdom have contrived, or his Power produced, or his boundleſs Liberality beſtow'd any Thing greater upon us than his own ſelf?

We may therefore with juſt Reaſon call it a *Great Supper*. And yet, how great ſoever this Supper is, the very Meaneſt of us have the Honour to be invited to it; nay we are not only invited, but even preſs'd and importuned to come; and our Saviour is highly diſpleaſed, if we refuſe to accept of his Bounty: What infinite Goodneſs is this! What ineſtimable Love! To make ungrateful Sinners, the Objects of the greateſt Bounty! To invite poor Worms of the Earth, to be Partakers of the Bread of Angels! To raiſe them from the Duſt, and place them at the Table of the King of Heaven and Earth!

But tho' this heavenly Banquet, conſidered only in its own intrinſick Worth, be a Gift of infinite Value, and an undoubted Pledge of the infinite Love of the Giver; yet there are ſome Circumſtances relating to the Inſtitution of it, which if conſider'd

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apart, will ſerve to heighten our Idea of Chriſt's Love, in beſtowing this great Gift upon us. Theſe then ſhall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

It is certain that the Affection of the Party that beſtows a Favour, is a conſiderable Addition to the intrinſick Value of it; as, on the contrary, the very greateſt Gifts loſe much of their Value, when they are preſented with a certain Coldneſs, or Indifference; becauſe whatever the Value of the Gift be in itſelf, the Heart and Inclination of the Giver is always more regarded than the Gift itſelf. Now, nothing is a ſurer Mark of the moſt affectionate Diſpoſition in the Heart, than when a Perſon has a certain preſſing Deſire, and earneſt Longing to beſtow his Favours: For as the firſt Effect of true Love is a Deſire to do good to the Perſon we love, ſo a great Deſire to good is an Effect and Mark of a great Love, and the greater this Deſire is, the greater is the Love, from which it proceeds.

This leads me to the *Firſt* Circumſtance, which in ſome Meaſure diſcovers to us the Greatneſs of our Saviour's Love in inſtituting the Sacrament of the Holy Euchariſt; *viz.* The earneſt Longing and Deſire he had to beſtow this Bleſſing on us. We have his own Words to aſſure us of it: For being at his Laſt Supper with his Apoſtles, and

upon the Point of Inſtituting this holy Banquet, he unboſomed himſelf to them in theſe affectionate Words; *With Longing have I deſired to eat this Paſſover with you.* He had already twice before that Time eaten the *Paſſover*; that is, the Supper of the Paſchal-Lamb with his Apoſtles: But that was only an empty Figure of the Banquet he was now preparing for them: And therefore he ſaid not, that he had with Longing deſired to eat *the* Paſſover, but to eat *this* Paſſover, with them before he ſuffered; meaning that Laſt Supper; wherein he deſigned to preſent them with the Subſtance inſtead of the Shadow, and feaſt their Souls with the Sacred Fleſh of the Immaculate Lamb, which takes away the Sins of the World. This had been the Subject of his Longing; this the Supper he ſo earneſtly deſired to eat with them before he parted from them.

But tho' our Saviour had been ſilent, the Action ſpeaks clearly for itſelf: For nothing is a more convincing Proof of an earneſt Deſire of any thing, than when it is ſo prevalent upon us, as to make us break thro' all Obſtacles that oppoſe the Execution of it. Now, of all Obſtacles to Liberality and Bounty, none can be imagined greater than that of notorious Ingratitude; becauſe *nothing* is either more provoking on the

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one hand, or renders a Perſon more unworthy even of the ſmalleſt Favours on the other, than an ungrateful Temper: All Mankind is ſo poſſeſs'd with this Principle, that even the moſt generous Spirits are ſcarce able to reſiſt this Provocation; and nothing but a more than ordinary Inclination to do good, can poſſibly prevail upon a Perſon to beſtow his Favours, where he expects no other Return than Injuries and Affronts.

Now then let us conſider, what Returns our Saviour expected the World would make him, for the great Bleſſing he was going to beſtow upon it; and whether he had not all the Provocation imaginable to hinder him from accompliſhing his loving Deſign: For at the very Time he inſtituted this heavenly Banquet, he knew his own choſen People, who were already indebted to him for ſo many ſignal Bleſſings, were aſſembled in Council, in order to contrive his Death: He knew that *Judas*, who was to be one of the firſt Partakers of it, had already entertained Thoughts to betray him; and would give the Devil full Poſſeſſion of his Soul, as ſoon as his ſacred Body and Blood ſhould enter into his Stomach: He knew, that Thouſands of Chriſtians would become guilty of the ſame horrid Sacrilege, by receiving this Bread

of Angels with Hearts already poſſeſs'd by the Devil; and that the greateſt Part of Mankind would utterly diſown the Favour, by their Diſbelief of it: Finally, he foreſaw, that, by beſtowing it, he ſhould expoſe his own ſacred Perſon to innumerable Outrages and Affronts; and that of all his Favours, deſigned for our eternal Salvation, none would be rendred more prejudicial to Souls, by their voluntary Abuſe of it, than this ſo ſignal a Pledge of his Love: Yet all this enormous Ingratitude of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, *Hereticks* and *Catholicks*, clearly foreſeen and known, could not put a Stop to his intended Bounty, nor hinder him from proſecuting his loving Deſign: So great was his Deſire to communicate himſelf to us; ſo great an Inclination had he to beſtow this heavenly Bleſſing upon us.

Thus then we ſee the Greatneſs of our Saviour's Love, in inſtituting this heavenly Banquet, from the earneſt Deſire and Longing he had to render us Partakers of ſo great a Bleſſing: But the Motives of this earneſt Deſire afford a *ſecond* Circumſtance, diſcovering yet more fully the Greatneſs of his Love. The *firſt* of theſe Motives is expreſs'd by him in theſe Words; *Do this in Remembrance of me:* By which we are given to underſtand, that the End he propoſed to himſelf, in inſtituting this heavenly

venly Banquet, was, that it might be to us as a laſting Token to remember him by: And is not this a moſt convincing Proof of a very extraordinary Love? Does it not at once diſcover both the Tenderneſs of a Father, and Affection of a Friend? For the greateſt Token a dying Parent can give of his Tenderneſs for his Children, is to beſtow his beſt Bleſſings upon them, and leave them Heirs of all he is worth; and the ſureſt Mark a Dying-Friend can give of his Affection to his ſurviving Friends, is to expreſs a kind Concern to be always remember'd by them: So that our Saviour, in this one Act, performed the Part both of a Friend and Parent; for we may truly ſay, that in bequeathing to us his own precious Body and Blood, he made us Heirs of a Treaſure of infinite Value; and in this he ſhewed himſelf a moſt tender Parent; and in leaving us this heavenly Banquet, in order to be remember'd by us, and ſurvive for ever in our Hearts, he ſhewed himſelf the beſt of Friends.

It is ſtrange, indeed, the King of Heaven and Earth ſhould have any Concern at all to be remember'd by us poor Worms of the Earth; but it is much more aſtoniſhing he ſhould be concerned for it to that Degree, as to leave us the richeſt Treaſure Heaven could beſtow, or Earth re-

ceive, as a Token to remember him by: For had he any Proſpect of Advantage by our being mindful of him? Or did he fear to be a Loſer by being forgot by us? No, certainly: But he knew we ſhould be great Gainers by daily remembring him, and great Loſers by being unmindful of him; and that was a ſufficient Motive to him to deſire to be always remembred by us: For the only Reaſon why he deſired it was, becauſe he loved us, and deſired to be reciprocally loved by us; as knowing it to be ſo much our true Intereſt to love him, that as it was impoſſible we ſhould be happy if we loved him not, ſo we could not but be truly happy if we loved him; and ſince a frequent Remembrance of him would be a powerful Means to create and nouriſh in our Hearts a true Love of him, he left us his precious Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Holy Euchariſt, as a ſubſiſting Memorial of him, and an everlaſting Token to remember him by.

The *ſecond* Motive why our Saviour would inſtitute this heavenly Banquet was, that we might for ever abide in him, and he in us; as is expreſly declared in theſe Words; *Whoever eateth my Fleſh, and drinketh my Blood, abideth in me, and I in him.* Which Words expreſs the moſt perfect

fect mutual Union we are capable of in this mortal Life; and help likewiſe to give us ſtill a fuller Idea of the Greatneſs of our Saviour's Love in this holy Inſtitution: For as all Love, whether of God or Man, tends to a kind of Union to the Object of that Love; ſo the more vehement the Love is, the cloſer is the Union it tends to: But whereas the perfecteſt Love between Man and Man can never go beyond a moral Union of Hearts, our loving Saviour has, by Means of the holy Euchariſt, found out an Expedient to unite himſelf really and truly to all that receive it: He lodges himſelf in our very Breaſts; he incorporates himſelf, as I may ſay, and becomes as it were one Fleſh with us: And therefore this Sacrament is, by ſome of the Fathers, called a kind of *Extenſion of the Incarnation*; that is, the Union of God and Man enlarged and extended to all that are made Partakers of it: For, by Means of it, he communicates himſelf not only to one ſingle Man; but is render'd communicable to all the Individuals of Mankind: So that whoever partakes of this holy Banquet, receives into himſelf, really and ſubſtantially, the ſame Divine Perſon, that once aſſumed our Nature in the immaculate Womb of the *Bleſſed Virgin Mary*.

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It may alſo be called an *Extenſion of the Incarnation*; becauſe as our Saviour was, by his Incarnation, once really born of the *Virgin Mary*; ſo is he, by the holy Euchariſt, ſpiritually re-born in the Souls of all that receive him worthily: And therefore, as he never will be ſeparated from the Nature he once aſſumed, ſo the proper Effect of the holy Euchariſt is a permanent Union with us, by ſanctifying Grace and Charity; as is clearly inſinuated by theſe Words; *Whoever eateth my Fleſh, and drinketh my Blood, abideth in me, and I in him:* For our Saviour ſays not, *whoever eateth my Fleſh, and drinketh my Blood,* ſhall exchange a paſſing Viſit with me, and ſo part from me again; but *abideth in me, and I in him:* Which imports a plain Condemnation of thoſe circular Viciſſitudes of Riſing and Falling, of Grace and Sin, Life and Death; and, in a Word, of communicating one Day with Chriſt, and a few Days after with the Devil, but too much practiſed by habitual Sinners: For, ſurely, it never was our Saviour's Intention to enter into us, as a Paſſenger into a Lodging, for a Day or two, and ſo leave us; but to take a permanent Poſſeſſion of our Hearts; to enter into them as an inſeparable Friend, as a domeſtick Companion to make his Abode with us for ever, and become

become the Source of a durable and laſting Grace.

And therefore thoſe, whoſe Lives go round in a continual Circle of communicating and relapſing into mortal Sin, do not only fruſtrate our Saviour's principal Intention, in the Inſtitution of this heavenly Banquet; but have alſo great Reaſon to fear, that tho' his ſacred Body has often enter'd into their Stomachs, he has perhaps but ſeldom entred by his holy Grace into their Souls. It is true, the Grace of the Sacrament, effectually received, may be loſt by the Surpriſe of a violent Temptation: But when Relapſes grow into a certain regular Cuſtom, 'tis much more to be ſuſpected, that the Grace of the holy Euchariſt has been but ſeldom received, than conſtantly loſt; becauſe, as our Saviour tells us, *whoever eats his Body, and drinks his Blood*; that is, receives it worthily, *abides in Chriſt, and Chriſt in him.*

Thus then we ſee the Greatneſs of our Saviour's Love in inſtituting this heavenly Banquet, diſcovered to us, *firſt*, by the vehement Deſire he had to beſtow this Bleſſing on us; and, *ſecondly*, by the two Motives of that Deſire, *viz.* that he might be always remember'd by us, and moſt intimately united to us: Whence we ought to form theſe three Reſolutions; *firſt*, to

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imitate the Goodneſs of our bleſſed Saviour, by doing good even to thoſe who repay us with Ingratitude; *ſecondly*, to fix in our Hearts a laſting Remembrance of him, with a deep Senſe of Gratitude for the Bleſſing received; and, *laſtly*, to live ſo, that Chriſt may abide in us, and we in him.

The LXth Entertainment.

The Returns we uſually make our Saviour for his Love.

They began all at once to excuſe themſelves. Luke xiv. 18.

I HAVE repreſented to you, in my former Diſcourſe, the Greatneſs of our Saviour's Love, in inſtituting the Sacrament of the Holy Euchariſt; I ſhall now make ſome Reflections upon the Returns we uſually make him for it; which ſhall be the whole Subject of this Entertainment.

The firſt Circumſtance, whereby we have diſcover'd the Greatneſs of our Saviour's Love in inſtituting the Holy Euchariſt, was the earneſt Deſire, and Longing he had to beſtow this Bleſſing on us; a Deſire

Deſire ſo great, that no Obſtacle could put a Stop to his intended Bounty. But how do we correſpond with this Deſire of our loving Saviour? Do we covet as earneſtly to receive him, as he deſires to communicate himſelf to us? Are we as ready to open our Hearts to let him in, as he is to enter into them? Do we long and hunger after this Bread of Life, with ſuch a craving Appetite, that no Obſtacle whatſoever, no temporal Concerns, no Pleaſures of this World can hinder us from ſatisfying our Hunger? Alas, how far are we from this happy Diſpoſition! How far are we from making our Saviour this acceptable Return! How truly, on the contrary, is the Behaviour of many Chriſtians repreſented in the Parable, from whence I have taken my Text! Where we have this Account of the Gueſts invited to the Supper. *They began all at once to excuſe themſelves.* One ſaid *he had bought a Country-Houſe, and muſt go ſee it.* Another alledg'd *he had bought five Yoke of Oxen, and was going to try them:* A third gave for Anſwer, *that he had married a Wife, and therefore could not come.*

By the firſt of theſe Characters are marked out thoſe, who ſpend their Time in trifling Amuzements; which they make in a Manner their whole Employment. By the

ſecond

ſecond Character, of him that *had bought Oxen, and was to try them*; are meant your Men of Buſineſs, whoſe whole Time and Thoughts are taken up with temporal Concerns. Finally, by the third Character, of him who *had married a Wife, and therefore could not come*; are ſignified Perſons wholly plunged in ſenſual Pleaſures: Now, all theſe put off the Invitation, and deſired to be excuſed: And how lively a Repreſentation is this of the Behaviour of many Chriſtians in Reference to the great Banquet of the Lord's Supper, to which all are invited!

Some neglect to frequent the holy Communion, meerly out of a ſlothful and careleſs Temper; and thoſe are your tepid or luke-warm Chriſtians. They are, for the moſt part, too conſcientious, on the one hand, to receive the Holy Euchariſt without being in ſome meaſure diſpoſed for it; and yet too ſlothful to prepare themſelves, on the other: They know they muſt do many Things, to be worthily diſpoſed: They muſt retire from Company, and be ſerious for ſome time: They muſt call themſelves to an Account by a ſtrict Examination of Conſcience; excite themſelves to a hearty Repentance; confeſs their Sins; perform their Penance; and be ſomewhat recollected before and after Communion. But their natural

tural Sloth, which they are accuſtomed to gratify, gives them ſuch a Repugnancy to all theſe Duties; that tho' they have often ſo much Time lying on their hands, that they ſcarce know how to diſpoſe of it, yet every trifling Accident, that throws itſelf in their Way; as a Party of Pleaſure to go ſee ſomething, that invites their Curioſity; ſuffices to make them put off their Communion.

Others again are ſo taken up with temporal Concerns, and overwhelm'd with Buſineſs, that, alas! they have no Time to pay their Attendance upon our Bleſſed Saviour at his Supper; and therefore theſe all, for the moſt part, put off the Invitation, and deſire to be excuſed; and whereas the former are uſually too ſlothful, theſe on the contrary are, for the moſt part, too full of Buſineſs, to ſave their Souls. But there is a third Sort, that excuſe themſelves, upon a Pretence yet worſe than the former. Thoſe I mean, who are ſtrongly addicted to ſenſual Pleaſures: God invites them often by his holy Inſpirations; but they know that to become Partakers of his holy Table, they muſt renounce their criminal Engagements; they muſt throw off their old Habits; and enter upon a new Courſe of Life. But finding their Hearts too ſtrongly engaged, to reſolve upon a

thorough

thorough Change, they refuſe the Invitation, and deſire to be excuſed

Thus we ſee how little the the greateſt Part of Chriſtians are diſpoſed to comply with our Saviour's earneſt Deſire of Communicating himſelf to them. He invites, and they refuſe to come. He offers them his precious Body and Blood, and they prefer each petty Intereſt, or trifling Satisfaction, before him.

But how did the Maſter of the Feaſt receive the Excuſes of the Parties invited? The Goſpel tells us, that he was highly offended, and declared that *none of them all ſhould ever taſte of his Supper.* We cannot doubt but that a Contempt as well Abuſe of God's Favours is a very grievous Offence, and what we ſhall account for at the laſt Day: Now, are we not guilty of a Contempt of the ineſtimable Bleſſing offer'd us in the holy Euchariſt, when we neglect to receive it, either becauſe we are unwilling to put ourſelves to ſome Trouble, or deprive ourſelves of ſome ſmall Satisfaction, and offer ſome Violence to our Inclinations, for its Sake? Is it not a convincing Proof that we prefer the Enjoyment of a little Eaſe or Pleaſure before it? And what is this but a barefac'd Contempt and Undervaluing of it.

Nor

Nor can we doubt, but this Neglect becomes to many, the firſt Step to their everlaſting Ruin; and their falling under that terrible Sentence of being eternally excluded from the Banquet prepared in Heaven: For, by depriving themſelves of this ſpiritual Food, the Health of their Souls is inſenſibly impair'd; their Virtues are as it were ſtarved; their Hearts poiſon'd with the World; their vital Spirits, I mean the moiſtning Grace of the Holy Ghoſt, dried up for want of this Fountain of living Waters; and finally their whole Souls ſcorch'd with the burning Fevers of Concupiſcence, Hatred, Revenge, Pride, Avarice, and other ſuch Paſſions; Almighty God abandoning them to their own Corruption, in Puniſhment of their Contempt of this holy Banquet; which thus becomes the Occaſion of the Death of their Souls in this Life, and their utter Ruin hereafter.

And therefore the Devil, knowing how much the Health and Life of our Souls depend upon this ſpiritual Food, uſes all Means poſſible to draw us from it; imitating therein the Policy of *Holophernes*, who having laid Siege to *Bethulia*, and conſulting with his Officers about the ſhorteſt and eaſieſt Way to reduce it, was adviſed to poſſeſs himſelf of the Fountains that ſup-

plied

plied the Town with Water; for being deprived of theſe, it would be forced to ſurrender without Battle or Blood-ſhed. This is the very Stratagem the Devil makes uſe of, to become, in a ſhort time, Maſter of our Souls. He does all he can to hinder us from having Acceſs to the *Fountain of living Waters*, the Body and Blood of *Jeſus Chriſt:* For he is ſure we cannot hold out a long Siege without it. A few Weeks will eaſily conſume the Portion of Grace, without which our Souls, cannot live ſpiritually; and this Supply being intercepted, they muſt be ſtarved of courſe, and ſurrender for Want of this ſpiritual Food.

But as we uſually make our Saviour but very ill Returns, for the great Deſire he has to communicate himſelf to us; ſo when we have ſometimes admitted him into our Breaſts, we have likewiſe for the moſt part, but little Regard to the principal Motive of that Deſire; which is, *to abide for ever with us.* What cold Entertainment do we uſualy give him! How little Care do we take to digeſt this ſpiritual Food; and convert it into ſolid Nouriſhment! How ſoon do we grow weary of his Company! A few diſtracted Prayers huddled over in haſte, and looking rather like a ſet Form of ceremonious Complements, than ſincere Expreſſions of true Love and Affection,

Affection, is all the Entertainment we uſually afford him. We ſeem to be afraid of his Company, as the Apoſtles were in the Time of his Paſſion; leſt ſome ſcurrilous Companion obſerving us to be more devout than uſually, ſhould in Deriſion put the ſame Queſtion to us, as the Maid put to St. *Peter*; *haſt thou not been with* Jeſus *this Morning?* And truly we take care, for the moſt part, to diſown him as much by our light and undevout Comportment immediately after Communion, as if we had not been at all in his Company that Day.

But no Compariſon repreſents our Behaviour ſo well, as that of the ungrateful *Geraſens*; who, ſoon after our Saviour's Arrival amongſt them, join'd all in an unanimous Petition to him, that he would forthwith depart from them. It is true our Behaviour is not ſo open and barefaced as theirs; but 'tis in Effect the ſame. We ſeem to be afraid leſt an attentive Regard to his Preſence ſhould be ſome Curb upon our Inclinations, or reſtrain the Freedom of our merry Entertainments; which rather than want for any Time, we immediately diſmiſs him, and in a Manner ſolicite his Departure from us.

And this is one principal Cauſe, why after ſo many Communions, we are ſtill ſo weak and inconſtant, ſo ſubject to Relapſes,

and

and defective in the Performance of our daily Duties. For 'tis not to be doubted, but the Effects of this Sacrament would appear in a Change of Life; if we put no Obſtacle to them, either by a Want of Preparation, or a negligent Comportment after Communion: For our Saviour deals many times with us, in this Caſe, as we deal with him. If we ſtay with him, and keep our Thoughts at home to bear him Company, he alſo ſtays with us; and all the Bleſſings he brings with him remain in our Souls: But if we have little or no Regard to his Divine Preſence; if we reſume forthwith our cuſtomary Diſtractions, and ſo fly from him, and in a Manner ſolicite his Departure; truly he often takes us at our Word, and withdraws himſelf from us, with the Graces and Bleſſings he had brought to enrich our Souls: For he dealt juſt ſo with foremention'd *Gerasens*, who deſiring him to quit their Country, he took them at their Word, and *departed from them.*

Thus it appears but too plainly what Sort of Returns we uſually make our Saviour for his infinite Love, in inſtituting this heavenly Banquet. He deſires moſt earneſtly to communicate himſelf to us; and we are unwilling to take the Trouble to prepare ourſelves for ſo great a Bleſſing: He

invites

invites us to his holy Table, and we ſeek a hundred frivolous Pretences to put off his loving Invitation: He has left us this ineſtimable Pledge of his Love, as a laſting Token to remember him by; and we ſeldom afford him a ſerious Thought: Finally he covets nothing more than to abide for ever in us, and we ſhake him off as ſoon as he comes to us; ſometimes by our undevout Behaviour after Communion, and and other Times by returning ſoon after to our Vomit.

But is it to be always ſo? Shall we always continue in this ſlothful Way, and never think of making him ſome better Requital for his infinite Love? Is there not a Day to come, wherein we ſhall be accountable for all Favours either neglected or abuſed? 'Tis this we ought at preſent to reflect ſeriouſly upon, in order to work ourſelves ſeriouſly into a ſincere and hearty Reſolution, *firſt*, to correct whatever Neglect we have hitherto been guilty of, in not having at due Times frequented the holy Sacraments; and 2*dly*, whenever this Duty calls upon us, to perform it ſo as to anſwer fully all the Ends, for which theſe Bleſſings were deſign'd.

It were to be heartily wiſh'd indeed, that all Chriſtians would diſpoſe themſelves weekly for this holy Table: However, ſince

this

this is rather to be wiſh'd than hoped for, at leaſt no Buſineſs ought to hinder any one from communicating once a Month: They ought to conſider, that the holy Communion is the Food and Nouriſhment of their Souls; which can no more live any conſiderable Time without it, than their Bodies can ſubſiſt without a competent Allowance of Meat and Drink: And therefore, as no Pretence of Buſineſs ever hinders them from nouriſhing their Bodies, ſo ought it not to hinder them from nouriſhing their Souls: and if any temporal Concerns prevail upon them to neglect this Duty, 'tis a manifeſt Sign they have a greater Concern for the one than for the other; and this Want of Concern for their eternal Intereſt is a convincing Proof that they are already dangerouſly ſick in Soul.

Care however muſt be taken, that whoever approaches to the holy Table, this Duty be ſo perform'd, that his Soul may become Partaker of the ſpiritual Nouriſhment for which it is ordained: He muſt therefore receive the Bread of Angels with a clean Heart, with a deep Senſe of Gratitude for ſo ineſtimable a Bleſſing, a ſincere Acknowledgment of his own Unworthineſs, a firm Belief of our Saviour's real Preſence, a hearty Confidence in his infinite Goodneſs, and an unfeign'd Love of him.

After

After Communion, he muſt entertain the Divine Gueſt he has received, with all the Affections of his Soul; unboſom his Heart entirely to him; lay before him all his ſpiritual Diſtempers; acknowledging his abſolute Dependance on him: He muſt importune him, with the two Diſciples of *Emmaus*, to ſtay with him, to be the Life and Health of his Soul, a Preſervative againſt the Corruption of the World, his Strength and Security againſt all Temptations, his Support and Comfort in his daily Afflictions, and his Guide to a happy Eternity.

The LXIſt Entertainment.

The Advantage of Afflictions.

We muſt, through many Tribulations, enter into the Kingdom of God. Act. xiv. 22.

IT is enough that it is God's eternal and and unchangeable Decree, that the Way to Heaven muſt be *through many Tribulations:* This alone ſuffices to render our Obligation of ſubmitting to it indiſpenſable; and it would be a criminal Preſumption, to queſtion the infinite Wiſdom and Juſtice

of God's Law, or aſk the Divine Creator why he has made us ſo? However, ſince all Means, appointed by God, have a natural Tendency to their End; we may be allow'd to enquire, how it is that Proſperity obſtructs, and Adverſity is naturally conducing to the eternal Good of our Souls; which I intend to do in this Entertainment, by ſhewing both the Prejudice Men uſually receive by the one, and the Advantages that uſually attend the other.

I obſerve three great Advantages in the Sufferings of this Life, which, if duly conſider'd, will in a great Meaſure allay their Bitterneſs, and diſpoſe us at leaſt to a patient Submiſſion to them. *Firſt*; they are a proper Means to diſengage the Heart from the Love of the World. *Secondly*, they are an Occaſion of our Improvement in Virtue; and, *Thirdly*, they inſtruct us in the Knowledge of ourſelves. That they are a proper Means to diſengage the Heart from the Love of the World, is clearly inſinuated in theſe Words of *Salomon* Prov. 17. 3. *As Silver is tried by fire, and Gold in the Furnace, ſo God tries the Hearts of Men.* For as Fire, not only tries, but refines Gold, by ſeperating it from its Alloy; ſo Almighty God both tries the Hearts of Men in the Furnace of Adverſity, and, at the ſame time, purifies them from the Droſs of earthly

earthly Affections; which debaſe the Soul, and ſink her beneath the Dignity of her ſpiritual Nature: For, ſince Man's Soul is created to love and enjoy an infinite Good, ſhe degrades herſelf by ſetting her Affections upon Creatures; and to deliver her from this State of Degradation, the Love, that cauſes it, muſt be removed.

Now Croſſes and Afflictions are the fitteſt for this purpoſe. The Reaſon is becauſe, ſince contrary Cauſes cannot but produce contrary Effects; it follows, that as we are naturally inclined to love thoſe, by whom we find ourſelves cheriſh'd and careſs'd, ſo we are no leſs apt to take a Diſlike to thoſe, who uſe us unkindly; and conſequently, as it is the ordinary Effect of Proſperity to make us fond of the World, ſo Nothing can be more proper to put us out of Conceit with it, than Adverſity. We need not uſe much Violence to our Inclinations, to quit a treacherous Friend; there being no better Cure for Love, than ill Uſage: As long as the World ſmiles upon us, as long as it is ready to flatter all our Inclinations, and every Thing goes according to our Heart's Deſire, 'tis a difficult Taſk to wean our Affections from it: But when the World turns croſs and ill-natur'd; when, inſtead of furniſhing us with Conveniences and Pleaſures, it loads us with Miſeries and

Croſſes, the Work is more than half done to our Hands; the main Obſtacle to God's Grace being already remov'd for us: Oh, then we are apt to reflect how treacherous a Friend this World is, and how great a Folly it is to ſet our Hearts upon it: Then we begin to ſee the Vanity of earthly Joys, and ſeek that Happineſs above, which we find the World either cannot, or refuſes to afford us.

The Rod and Reproof give Wiſdom, ſays *Salomon*; and indeed, if any Thing will make us truly wiſe, the Rod of Afflictions is moſt like to do it. Proſperity, like the Fumes of Wine, is but apt to turn the Brain, and intoxicate the Mind; and Adverſity is the proper Remedy for this ſpiritual Drunkenneſs: It opens our Eyes, and diſcovers clearly the Cheat and Vanity of earthly Goods, by giving us an experimental Knowledge of their Emptineſs and Inconſtancy: It convinces the Judgment that the World is not the fine thing Men uſually take it to be; and when the Judgment, is once throughly convinced of this Truth, the Heart is in a fair Way of being cured of its former Dotage: And therefore, when our heavenly Phyſician ſees us ſo love-ſick of the World, that ordinary Remedies, I mean his ordinary Inſpirations, are ineffectual, and that we go on obſtinately poiſoning

ing ourſelves ſtill more and more with the Pleaſures of it; his uſual Method in this Caſe, is to take away from us theſe bewitching Enjoyments, which chiefly nouriſhed the Diſtemper; that, the Cauſe of the Evil being thus removed, his healing Grace may meet no Obſtacle to hinder it from working a complete and perfect Cure.

We have a remarkable Figure of this Truth, in the Perſon of the *Prodigal Son*; who, as long as he had Means to gratify his Paſſions, continued in all his irregular Courſes, and never thought of returning to his Father: But as ſoon as he was deprived of thoſe Means, and Extremity of Want had put it out of his Power to enjoy any longer his beloved Pleaſures; he immediately enter'd into himſelf, and began to reflect on the Folly he had committed, in leaving his Father's Houſe: Whereupon he reſolved to go, without Delay, and throw himſelf at his Father's Feet, to make his Peace with him.

Now many imitate the Undutifulneſs of this *Prodigal Son*, in removing themſelves at a Diſtance from their heavenly Father, and giving themſelves over to the ſinful Luſts and Pleaſures of this Life: And this is uſually the unhappy Caſe of thoſe that are bleſſed with Plenty: Their Riches are,

for the moſt Part, made the Inſtruments and Support of Vice; they grow wanton with Eaſe and Over-pampering; and Proſperity makes them not only forget their Benefactor, but even abuſe him with his own Gifts. I appeal to any Man's Obſervation, whether it be not ſo: For, caſt but an Eye amongſt Sinners, and ſee who are the Perſons moſt remarkable for ſcandalous Irregularities? Are they not the Rich? Who are the great Patrons of Lewdneſs, Vanity, Intemperance, Idleneſs, and Prodigality? Are they not your Men of plentiful Fortunes, who are furniſhed with Means to be at the Charge of theſe expenſive Vices? So that, upon a general View of Mankind, it will appear, that Sin abounds moſt, where temporal Bleſſings are moſt plentifully beſtowed.

And how then muſt theſe Prodigals be reclaimed from their evil Ways, and obliged to return to their heavenly Father? Truly, where Almighty God has a peculiar Mercy in Store, to retrieve thoſe that are thus gone aſtray, Affliction is the Expedient he generally makes uſe of, to prepare them for this Bleſſing: And 'tis, without diſpute, of all Expedients the moſt natural: *Firſt*, Becauſe it diſarms their Enemy; by taking away from them the Things that took their Hearts from God, and removing the

the main Obſtacle of their Return to him: *Secondly*, Becauſe it helps to weaken their Paſſions; by depriving them of the Objects that chiefly fomented them, and putting it out of their Power to gratify them as formerly: And, *laſtly*, by imbittering the World to them, and making that become their Croſs, which formerly was their Delight; it obliges them to ſeek their Comfort in the Hopes of a better World hereafter: And thus it is our merciful Father many Times withdraws the World from us, when he ſees us obſtinately reſolved not to withdraw our Affections from the World; compelling us, as it were, by this merciful Expedient, to raiſe our Hearts above the Earth, and make Heaven the chief Object of our Deſires.

But as Afflictions are a ſovereign Remedy againſt the Love of the World, by way of Cure, ſo are they no leſs uſeful by way of Prevention; as is evident from all the Reaſons I have inſiſted upon, which hold for the one as well as the other: And 'tis not to be doubted, but when God ſends Afflictions to thoſe whoſe Hearts are yet untainted, he deſigns them for this End; and the Mercy ſeems the greater, by as much as it is better to be wholly preſerved from Infection, than to ſtand in Need of being cured of it. This is a ſolid Com-

fort to all ſuch as have ever been afflicted with Poverty, and forced to earn their Bread with hard Toil and Labour: For when they conſider how generally Riches are abuſed, what numberleſs Sins are occaſioned by them, and how few of thoſe that poſſeſs them, give any Hopes of their living in a State of Salvation; they have Reaſon enough to conclude, that if God had favoured them with Plenty, they would, in all Likelihood, have ſet their Hearts as much upon the World, and made as ill Uſe of his Bleſſings, as others: And that whereas their Poverty, hard Fare, and Labour, have not only contributed to weaken their Paſſions, but even put it out of their Power to gratify them in any notorious Manner; Riches might have engaged them, as it has many others, in a thouſand ſcandalous Extravagances, and been the Cauſe of their everlaſting Ruin.

And ought they not then, inſtead of being always upon the Fret, and apt to murmur at the Diſpenſations of Providence; ought they not, I ſay, to be heartily content with their Condition, and ever acknowledge a Providential Mercy, in their being kept out of the Reach of thoſe dangerous Temptations, by which infinite Numbers are daily overcome? Ought they not to count it a Bleſſing, to be deprived

prived of ſuch Bleſſings, as, through their Abuſe of them, would, in all Likelihood, have betray'd them to eternal Curſes? Truly, if they have any Belief of a Future State, or Value for what may be a Help to make them happy in it, this Conſideration muſt comfort them, at leaſt ſo far, as to to quell all Murmurs, and make them ſubmit to the Circumſtances, which Providence has appointed for them, with Patience and Peace of Mind.

But to proceed to the two latter Heads mentioned by me; both Reaſon and Experience teach us, that Afflictions are not only a ſovereign Remedy againſt the Love of the World, but an Occaſion of Improvement in many excellent Virtues: I need but inſtance in that of *Humility*, which is the Ground-work of all the reſt: For we may confidently ſay, Adverſity is the Mother, Nurſe, and Guardian of it; ſince nothing is more rare, than to find Men truly humble in a proſperous and flouriſhing Condition; becauſe nothing is more difficult than to preſerve an humble Mind, when all Things concur to inſpire us with great Ideas of ourſelves. This made St. *Auſtin* ſay, that it is a more than ordinary Happineſs not to be overcome by worldly Felicity; and that it is much eaſier not to ſink under Adverſity, than not to be elevated with Proſperity.

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The Reaſon hereof is, becauſe Man's Nature is much more inclined to Pride, than to Dejection or Deſpair; and ſtands more in Need of Humiliations than Encouragements, to keep the Ballance of the Soul equal. Almoſt every Trifle ſuffices to ſwell us with Vanity; but it muſt be a very great Load of Misfortunes to ſink us into Deſpair: For do we not find, that any one good Quality, whether of Mind or Body, tho' joined with many groſs Defects both of the one and the other, ſuffices to make us ſet a Value on ourſelves? Are we not many Times inſolent and haughty with a little Succeſs; tho' blind Chance had perhaps the greateſt Share in it? Will not a little Applauſe or Commendation, tho' never ſo undeſerved, nay even barefaced Flattery, exalt us in our own Conceit? Nay, how many are puffed up with Pride, merely upon the Account of Wealth, tho' they have nothing elſe to recommend them? How many again value themſelves upon their Conſtitution, a well-ſhaped Body, a handſome Face, a fine Suit of Cloaths, a gaudy Equipage, and ſuch like Fooleries? For Pride is a Paſſion of that ſtrange Nature, that it will even feed upon imaginary Excellencies, and mere airy Fancies, when it has nothing real and ſolid to ſubſiſt upon: Whence we may gather how ſtrongly

ſtrongly Nature is inclined to it; and how much we ſtand in need of ſome conſiderable Counterpoiſe to ballance the Soul, and bring her down to a juſt Pitch of Chriſtian Humility.

Now, what can be more likely to do us this good Office, than Croſſes and Afflictions? Proſperity is, doubtleſs, only proper to add more Fewel to the Fire: For ſince we are ſo apt to be proud and vain, even when we have little or nothing to incite us to it; is it not evident, that Proſperity muſt needs heighten this Paſſion to a very great Degree; ſince almoſt every Circumſtance, relating to that State, contributes more or leſs to nouriſh the Diſtemper? For, *Firſt*, As to the Power and Authority, that uſually attends a plentiful Fortune; is there any Thing more apt to raiſe Men's Thoughts, and ſwell them with high Ideas of themſelves? *Secondly*, As to the Honour, Reſpect, Deference, and Attendance, uſually paid to thoſe whom Fortune ſmiles upon; do not all theſe Things contribute to inflame the Humour? *Laſtly*, The exorbitant Praiſes and Flatteries, which are ſeldom wanting, where any Thing is to be hoped for; are they not juſt ſo much Oil thrown upon a Flame?

Hence it is, that Proſperity has generally this unhappy Effect upon Men's

Minds;

Minds; that whereas they ſee themſelves diſtinguiſhed from others in their Fortunes, it makes them alſo fancy themſelves diſtinguiſhed from them in their intrinſick Worth and Value; and to ſet up, as it were, for precious Things, made up of ſome better Matter, than their Fellow-Mortals, and only placed in the World to be reſpected, waited on, and idolized by them: Nor is this any Exaggeration; ſince both Sacred and Prophane Hiſtory furniſh us with ſeveral Inſtances of Perſons, whom a long Courſe of proſperous Fortune ſwelled to that Height of Pride, as to make them even forget they were Men, and ſet up for Gods. This, indeed, is the higheſt Degree of Madneſs, rather than Pride: However, it ſhews what Influence Proſperity has upon Men's Minds; and tho' it produces but ſeldom theſe monſtrous Effects, it generally raiſes them high enough to make us ſtand in need of very conſiderable Humiliations, to bring us down to a moderate Temper, and true Chriſtian Senſe of ourſelves.

Now, from the Rule of Contraries, it follows, that Afflictions are the only natural Cure for this dangerous Impoſtume of the Mind: For if Proſperity cauſes, or at leaſt inflames the Diſtemper, Afflictions muſt needs abate it: If Proſperity ſwells the

the Heart, Afflictions cannot but be a Means to humble it: And the Reaſon is, becauſe they make us enter ſeriouſly into ourſelves; by putting us in Mind, that we are not only Men, but in the loweſt Rank of Men; that is, poor Criminals ſmarting under the Scourge of Divine Juſtice, and only worthy of Chaſtiſements: Which Conſiderations lay the moſt ſolid Foundation of Chriſtian Humility, and are the beſt Cure for Pride.

Thus the wicked *Manaſſes*, who inſulted God, on the Throne, became humble and penitent, under the Weight of his Chains: Thus likewiſe the proud *Nebuchadnezzar*, who, in the Height of Proſperity, would needs be worſhipped as a God; being dethroned, and reduced to a Condition even beneath that of Man, acknowledged the Hand that ſtruck him, and humbled himſelf under it: So that we may confidently ſay, this excellent Virtue of Humility is ſcarce ever ſecure, but under the Shelter of Adverſity: It is a Plant that ſeldom grows in a rich Soil; it is a Child that thrives beſt under a ſtrict and ſevere Diſcipline: The Smiles and Careſſes of Fortune, like the Over-Indulgence of a fond Mother, contribute only to its Ruin. Many Souls have been killed with this Sort of Kindneſs; and many others owe their everlaſting Happi-

neſs

neſs, to what the World calls Misfortunes. How many Sinners have been reclaimed this Way! How many are now Saints in Heaven; who muſt confeſs, that Sickneſs, Poverty, Diſgrace, or ſome other Affliction, has been the happy Occaſion of their having been humbled into thoſe Diſpoſitions, which fitted them for the State of Bliſs! And that if the World had continued to ſmile upon them, their Pride had brought them to their everlaſting Ruin!

Laſtly, Afflictions, as I told you, inſtruct us in the Knowledge of ourſelves; by undeceiving us many times, as to the falſe Opinion we are apt to have of our own Virtue: For Men are ſtrangely ſubject to delude themſelves in this Point; and miſtake their ſpeculative Ideas of Virtue, for Virtue itſelf. How many, whilſt they had nothing to trouble them, have ſtrangely fancied themſelves able to ſuffer any Thing for God's Sake! But when it came to the Trial, have found, by ſad Experience, they were not the courageous Men they took themſelves for; and were taught to know themſelves better. Thus, whilſt the Danger was at a Diſtance, St. *Peter* valued himſelf upon his Courage, and boaſted he would rather die, than deny his Maſter: But, being put to the Proof, his

his Heart failed him, and his Fall inſtructed him in the Knowledge of his own Weakneſs.

And ſo it happens many Times with us: We are as ſtout as Heroes, as long as the Enemy is out of Sight: We think we can ſuffer great Matters, as long as there is nothing to ſuffer: Some hot Fit of Devotion warms the Imagination into many ſtrong-fancied Reſolutions: We make Acts of *Patience*, *Humility*, *Reſignation* to the Will of God, and ſo forth: And tho' all this be no more than the Bravery of Soldiers in a Mock-fight, we are apt to believe ourſelves to be, in effect, what we then ſeemingly reſolve to be: But in the Day of Battle it appears what we truly are. We may then certainly inform ourſelves, whether our Patience, Humility, and Reſignation to the Will of God, be real, or only imaginary: And therefore Afflictions are, in the Scripture-Language, called *Trials*; becauſe they are the Proof of Virtue: They are the Touch-ſtone upon which it is tried; and by them we may infallibly know whether it be true or counterfeit Gold; and whether it be in the Heart as well as in the Intellect or Imagination.

You ſee then what conſiderable Advantages Afflictions bring with them; how love-

ſovereign a Remedy they are againſt the poiſonous Love of the World; how they cure us of our Pride, and inſtruct us in the Knowledge of ourſelves: And are not theſe Advantages conſiderable enough to challenge, at leaſt, an hearty Submiſſion to any Affliction Almighty God ſhall ſend us? It is evident, they contribute to facilitate our Paſſage to a better Life; at leaſt by removing Obſtacles, and diminiſhing the Dangers of it: And therefore, whoever has a true Concern for his eternal Intereſt, cannot reaſonably be diſſatisfied, if God thinks fit to allot him his Portion amongſt the Sufferers in this Life; ſince, in ſo doing, he only takes care to put him in a ſafer Way to Heaven, than he would have choſen, had he been left to carve for himſelf: And ought not then all ſuffering Chriſtians to be ſenſible, that Providence has dealt favourably with them; in having ſecured them from the Dangers by which Thouſands have periſhed eternally? Ought they not to forbear murmuring, and ſubmit chearfully to their Condition; when it is manifeſt, that all the Reaſon they have to murmur is, becauſe Almighty God has removed them out of the Occaſion of making themſelves unhappy for ever? Here, ſurely, is Motive enough to make them be at leaſt reſigned, even under the heavieſt

heavieſt Croſſes; and pray to God, with their whole Hearts, that his holy Will may ever be accompliſhed.

The LXIId ENTERTAINMENT.

Motives of Comfort in the Sufferings of this Life.

John in Chains. Matth. xi. 2.

JOHN in Priſon, and loaden with Chains, is both the Comfort and Inſtruction of all ſuffering Chriſtians. He is their Comfort, in giving them Occaſion to reflect, that if Almighty God permits them now to be afflicted; they receive no harder Meaſure than his beſt Friends have done before them: He is alſo their Inſtruction, in teaching them, that ſuffering in this Life is the ordinary Portion of the Juſt; becauſe moſt proper to fit them for the Joys of the Life to come. 'Tis true, Self-love cannot reliſh this Chriſtian Philoſophy; being ever apt to conſider Afflictions on their moſt unfavourable Side, and as they are a Grievance to Nature; under which Conſideration there appears nothing in them,

them, but what creates Uneaſineſs and Averſion.

However, ſince we find by Experience, that the moſt loathſome and painful Remedies are chearfully ſubmitted to by the Patient, becauſe he hopes to find Eaſe and Benefit by them; 'tis alſo to be hoped, that if we conſult Faith, and Reaſon directed by it, we may diſcover ſuch ſolid Motives of Comfort in the Sufferings of this Life, as will ſuffice to make us receive them with the moſt chearful Submiſſion: The proper Motives therefore to work in us this Chriſtian Diſpoſition, ſhall be the Subject of this Diſcourſe.

The *firſt* Conſideration, which ought to to make us receive Afflictions with a chearful Submiſſion, is, that they are a Mark and Pledge of God's Love. The Hiſtory of *Tobie* gives us an undoubted Inſtance of this Truth: This holy Man had been, from his Infancy, brought up in the Fear of God, and Practice of all religious Duties: But the Virtue he moſt excell'd in, was his unwearied Charity to his afflicted Brethren; whom, in the Time of their Captivity, he relieved to the utmoſt of his Power, and even with the Hazard of his Life. Almighty God had many Ways tried the Virtue of this faithful Servant, and at length was pleaſed to viſit him with the

Loſs

Loſs of both his Eyes; which Affliction, tho' very grievous in itſelf, was much aggravated by the unjuſt Reproaches of his Wife and Kindred; who inſtead of comforting him in his Misfortune, inſulted over him; accuſing him of Weakneſs and Folly, for having vainly truſted in God; and aſking him in a reproachful Manner, if theſe were the Fruits of his paſt Alms and good Works.

But Almighty God ſoon after convinced them of their Error; and made it appear, that the Affliction he had ſent his Servant, was not a Mark of his Anger, but a Token of his Favour. For when the Angel *Raphael*, who had conducted his Son in his Journey to *Rages*, and back again, was upon the Point of diſcovering himſelf; he firſt aſſured him, that his Alms and Works of Mercy had been highly pleaſing to God; and then told him that the true Reaſon why God had ſent him ſo great an Affliction was, becauſe he was acceptable to him. *And becauſe thou wert acceptable to God, it was neceſſary that Affliction ſhould try thee.*

But let the Caſe of St. *John Baptiſt*, as it is repreſented in the Goſpel, whence I have taken my Text, ſerve for a ſecond Inſtance of this Truth. He was undoubtedly a particular Favourite of Heaven, and a Perſon of extraordinary Merit; as having been miracu-

louſly ſanctified in his Mother's Womb; choſen by God to be the Forerunner of the Saviour of the World; and honour'd by Chriſt himſelf with the greateſt Character that was ever given of any Man: And yet, this Child of Providence, this Darling of Heaven, and Favourite of *Jeſus Chriſt*, is thrown into Priſon, and loaden with Chains, expecting hourly the Stroke of Death; whilſt the wicked and inceſtuous *Herod* enjoyed a proſperous Reign, and wallowed in all the Pleaſures the World could afford him: And is not this again an evident Proof, that Sufferings are the ordinary Portion of the Juſt in this Life, and Pledges of their being in God's Favour?

However, not to content ourſelves with a few particular Inſtances of this Nature; let us take a View of all the known and celebrated Saints, ſince the Creation of the World, down to this very Age; and we ſhall find, they were all made to drink large Draughts of the bitter Cup of Afflictions. In the *firſt* Place, we ſhall meet with innumerable Champions of Chriſt, let looſe to the brutal Rage and Malice of the bloodieſt Tyrants: *Secondly*, Innumerable Confeſſors, made the Scorn and Reproach of Men; and infinite Numbers undergoing a lingring Martyrdom, in Baniſhments or Priſons, in the Loſs of Friends, Forfeiture of

of Eſtates, painful Sickneſſes, and, in a word, in all the hardeſt Trials of Poverty, Abjection and Contempt. Now, were not all theſe eminent Sufferers God's peculiar Friends, and the Darlings of Heaven? They were undoubtedly ſo. And therefore, ſince we find that Almighty God has ever been pleaſed to carry his beſt Servants thro' the moſt painful Trials; and that not one of thoſe, whoſe eternal Happineſs we are unqueſtionably aſſured of, has been exempt from Sufferings; nothing is more evident, than that Afflictions are Favours, which God beſtows upon his beſt Friends; as the moſt undoubted Marks and Pledges of his Love.

St. *Paul* is very large upon this Argument, in his Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*. Chap. xii. His Words are very remarkable, and challenge a particular Attention. *My Son*, ſays he, *deſpiſe not the Chaſtiſement of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked by him: For whom the Lord loveth, he chaſtiſeth, and ſcourgeth every Son whom he receiveth. If you endure Chaſtiſement, God deals with you as with Sons; for what Son is he, whom the Father chaſtiſeth not? But if ye are without Chaſtiſement, whereof all are Partakers, then you are Baſtards, and not Sons.* You ſee, St. *Paul* lays it here down for an undoubted Maxim, *that God chaſtiſes all he loves*; that to be ſcourged

by

by him is to be treated as a *Son*; and that there is no having a Share in God's Favour, without being a Sufferer in this Life; in a word, to be afflicted, according to St. *Paul*, is to be mark'd with the Character of the *Elect*; and to be without Affliction, is to bear the Mark of a *Reprobate*, and one excluded out of the Number of God's Children.

Truly, if we conſider'd theſe Words of the *Apoſtle* as divine Oracles, and prompted by the Spirit of Truth; the Proſperity of this World, inſtead of yielding any Comfort, would be a ſtrange Alarm to ſuch as are allow'd an undiſturb'd Enjoyment of it; and on the contrary, whenever Almighty God ſhould pleaſe to viſit us with any Affliction; inſtead of being dejected under it, and giving way to Melancholy and Sadneſs, we ſhould receive it with Joy, and not only ſubmit to, but even kiſs the Hand that chaſtiſes us. All our Complaints and Murmurs would be turn'd into Praiſes and Thankſgivings. We ſhould reaſon thus with ourſelves: It is my loving Father has preſented me with this Token of his Kindneſs; he has viſited me with this gentle Correction, to ſhew he has not yet utterly caſt me off, as my Sins have deſerved: He is ſtill pleaſed to treat me, as one of his Children; tho' I have many *times* forfeited my Title: And ought I

not

not then to be chearfully reſign'd to his Divine Pleaſure? Ought I not to praiſe and bleſs his holy Name, for thus correcting me in his Mercy, inſtead of puniſhing me in his Wrath? Theſe, I ſay, would be the ſincere Sentiments of our Hearts, if we conſider'd Things with Eyes of Faith; and not merely as they are agreeable or diſagreeable to Fleſh and Blood.

But if, without pretending to pry into God's ſecret Counſels, we may, for the improving and ſtrengthing our Faith, be allow'd to conſider the Reaſons, why God ſhould treat his Friends with this ſeeming Rigour; the *firſt* that offers itſelf is, becauſe God's Love of the Predeſtinate conſiſts chiefly in his deſiring and procuring their real and ſubſtantial Good. Now, Man's greateſt Good in the World is to contemn the World, and make Heaven the ſole Object of his Deſires. And ſince, as I have ſhew'd in my preceding Diſcourſe, Proſperity is apt to draw the Heart from God, and fix it it upon Creatures; therefore Almighty God, to preſerve thoſe he loves from this Misfortune, takes care the World ſhall be uneaſy to them, and ſo give them no Encouragement to be fond of it; but oblige them to ſeek their Content elſe-where. And who ſees not that there is ſo much of Goodneſs and Mercy in this Expedient, tho' ſeemingly

ſeemingly ſevere, as to deſerve the moſt grateful Acknowledgments, our Hearts can make him for it?

The *ſecond* is, becauſe ſince even the moſt virtuous Chriſtians are ſubject to many ſinful Imperfections; and all Sin whatſoever muſt be ſatisfy'd for, either in this World or the next; Almighty God, who knows to what Rigor the very laſt Farthing will be exacted hereafter, is graciouſly pleaſed to furniſh thoſe he loves, with Means to ſatisfy his Juſtice, at a much eaſier Rate; by obliging them to ſuffer ſomething in this Life, which, being offer'd up in the Spirit of Penance, his Goodneſs, in conſideration hereof, is willing to releaſe the great Debt, either wholly or in part, which they were otherwiſe obliged to pay. So that ſuffering in this World, if but rightly managed, and not render'd uſeleſs by a willful Indiſcretion, is as great an Advantage to Sinners; as it would be to a Perſon overwhelm'd with Debts, to have it in his Power to clear them all, or at leaſt diſcharge the greateſt Part, by only making an Acknowledgment of ſome inconſiderable Trifle to his Creditors. And as it would be an Act of uncommon Generoſity in a Creditor, not only to accept of, but even to furniſh his Debtors with Means to make him this Acknowledgment;

ment; ſo we cannot ſufficiently admire the Divine Bounty for putting into our Hands the Opportunity of cancelling with ſo much Eaſe the great Debt we have contracted to him.

The *third* and laſt Reaſon is, becauſe Chriſt, who is the Pattern of all Chriſtians, having been pleaſed to chooſe a ſuffering Life for himſelf; it is requiſite that every Chriſtian ſhould be conformable to him in this Point: *Firſt*, becauſe, as the Goſpel tells us, *the Perfection of a Diſciple conſiſts in being like his Maſter:* And *Secondly*, becauſe, according to St. *Paul*'s Doctrine, God has decreed that one Condition neceſſary to prepare the Predeſtinate for the State of Bliſs, ſhall be their *Conformity to the Image of his Son.* Whence it follows, that by their being Sufferers like him, they are perfected in this Life, and fitted for the Life to come: And ſo it is no Wonder, that the Love God bears the Predeſtinate ſhould prompt him to furniſh them with ſuitable Means, to procure them this double Bleſſing.

Hence follows another comfortable Conſideration, wherewith I will end; to wit, that the Afflictions of this Life, entitle us to everlaſting Joys: For the ſame Divine Lips, that pronounced this terrible Sentence, *Wo be to you who laugh, for ye*

ſhall weep hereafter, have alſo deliver'd this comfortable Truth, *Bleſſed are they who weep, for they ſhall be comforted*; and our Saviour had no ſooner told his Apoſtles that *the World ſhould rejoice, and they ſhould be ſorrowful*, but he immediately allay'd the Bitterneſs of this Sentence with the following Promiſe, *but your Sorrow ſhall be turn'd into Joy*. Our dear Redeemer calls us indeed to a Share in his Sufferings, but upon theſe advantagious Terms, that we ſhall hereafter be Partners with him in his Glory; he invites us now to a Part of his bitter Cup, but upon Promiſe to admit us hereafter to the full Torrent of heavenly Delights. And is not this a ſolid Comfort to a Chriſtian Soul? Is it not a Cordial to revive our Spirits under the heavieſt Load of Afflictions? Can we be unwilling to ſuffer upon Terms of ſuch Advantage? To paſs through ſhort Afflictions to eternal Reſt? To endure ſome ſmall Pain or Trouble, for a Happineſs that will never end?

For, are not all Sufferings ſhort and ſmall, when compared with Joys that are infinite and everlaſting? St. *Paul* allows them in a Manner no Duration at all in the Compariſon; but calls them *light and momentary*: Nay they might juſtly be call'd *momentary*, tho' they ſhould laſt a Man's whole Life without Intermiſſion; becauſe

even

even the very longeſt Term of Years we can imagine, has leſs Proportion to Eternity, than one ſingle Minute has to whole Ages. Now who of us all would not be willingly afflicted for ſome Moments, upon Condition he were to be completely happy his whole Life after? And ought we not then even to rejoice in the Afflictions of this Life, ſince a whole Eternity of Joys, may be purchaſed with them.

Hear how our Saviour preſſes this Argument to his Apoſtles. *Bleſſed are ye*, ſays he, *when Men ſhall revile you, and perſecute you, and ſhall ſay all manner of Evil againſt you falſely for my Sake; rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your Reward in Heaven.* You ſee he pronounces them bleſſed, when they ſhall be under Perſecution and Affliction; and exhorts them *to rejoice, and be exceedingly glad:* And why ſo? *becauſe their Reward is great Heaven.* This has been the Comfort of all Saints that have gone before us: They have all paſſed through many Tribulations to the Kingdom of Heaven. They were content to *ſow in Tears*, becauſe they were aſſured they ſhould hereafter *reap in Joy.* Let this then alſo be our Comfort; let the Hopes and Expectation of thoſe bleſſed Joys, ſupport us under the Sufferings of this Life; and when the Weight of any

Trouble begins to preſs hard upon the Soul, let us reflect that Croſſes and Afflictions are the kindeſt Pledges of God's Love, the ſureſt Marks of Predeſtination, and the Seeds of everlaſting Glory.

Theſe Conſiderations, if often repeated, and deeply imprinted in the Mind, will by Degrees work Nature into a ready Acquieſcence to whatever Almighty God ſhall ordain: Not that they will utterly ſtifle all inward Diſturbances, or prevent all ſudden Surpriſes of Grief: For Fleſh and Blood will have their Grains of Allowance; Conſtitution and Temper muſt alſo be conſider'd; nor can the Workings of an unruly Imagination be altogether ſuppreſs'd: But the Purpoſe they are chiefly deſign'd to be ſerviceable to, is to keep the Heart at leaſt in a ſteady Subjection to the Will of God, even whilſt the ſenſitive Part of the Soul ſeems to mutiny and rebel: If they have not Force enough to diſpel all Clouds of Sadneſs, they will at leaſt ſo far hinder them from darkening the Soul, that the Light of Faith and Reaſon will ſtill have the chief Direction of her: Finally, they will moderate our Grief, and keep it under Reſtraint; tho' they cannot utterly deſtroy it. This, I ſay, is the Uſe they are intended for; and therefore when I ſaid that the forementioned Conſiderations will make

make us receive Afflictions, not only with Patience, but even with Joy; my Meaning is not, that we ſhall be delighted with the painful Part of our Sufferings; but that in ſpite of their Diſagreeableneſs to Senſe and Nature, we ſhall find Motives enough to rejoice in them; not for their own Sake, but as the Will of God is conſider'd in them, and for the Bleſſings they intitle us to: So that whilſt the Body is uneaſy and ſmarting under the Scourge, the Soul may be filled with Comfort and Joy, in ſeeing herſelf in ſo good a Way to the ſecure and everlaſting Poſſeſſion of the infinite Good for which She is Created.

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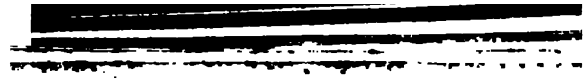
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